THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

John Oxenham

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THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

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God's Candle

THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

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THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

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BY JOHN OXENHAM

FIRST EDITION

MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

ERICA

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF ALL SHE IS TO ME
AND TO SO MANY OTHERS

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THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DAWN

CHAPTER I

From Cornelius Pudens Flaccus at Jerusalem to Sergius Paulus Græcinus at Rome *

The Kalends of June in the eighteenth year of Tiberius

Your very welcome letter reached me but yesterday. My heart rejoiced greatly at sight of it.

You tell me that you have written several times in these last three years but have had no answers from me. Well, I too have written several times and have received no answer from you. So we will lay the blame on the post, which in these days leaves much to be desired. But the fact, which I now learn for the first time, that you have been in Gaul and Spain with your father, suggests

* This letter from Cornelius Flaccus to his friend in Rome formed the last chapter of "God's Candle." In *The Splendour of the Dawn* he tells the rest of the story of his life, and as it fully explains him it is deemed well to reprint it here.

ample reason for our letters not reaching their destinations.

All your good news of your family interests me enormously. Your father and mother were always so kind and gracious to the lonely boy who found your home so much more of a home than his own. I am hinting no reproach against any. But, after the ever-to-be-regretted death of my mother, my father's duties to the Empire absorbed him more and more, as you know, and without your home and its ever-warm welcome, life would have been but a dull affair for me.

That your sister, the Lady Pomponia, has innumerable suitors is no surprise to me. It would be strange indeed were it otherwise. For my recollection of her as a girl, three years ago, has suffered no eclipse — nor can. A warmer heart and a loftier soul enshrined in a more exquisite temple I do not think it would be possible to find. It may please her to add a lonely exile in this distant land of Palestine to the number of her worshippers.

But what supremely challenges me in your admirable letter is your question anent the young Jewish Teacher who was just beginning to stir

up this old hive — this old wasps' nest rather — about the time you returned to Rome.

I recall now your interest in him, but I should have expected it to be entirely overlaid by all your wonderful experiences since you left us. I am indeed glad that it is not so.

I will tell you as clearly as I can all that I know about him. And that involves the confession of an unworthiness on my part which causes me now most poignant shame and sorrow. But, remembering that I was then but a thoughtless boy, not yet fifteen, your friendship will condone it with sympathy and understanding. You and yours were ever kind to my failings, for you recognized that I had been denied that helpfulness of discipline and example which you yourselves enjoyed in such ample measure.

To tell you first of my lapse, for from it all the rest follows.

You remember how, on their great Spring Feast-Day, the Jews from everywhere gathered at Jerusalem, in the city and around it.

It was always an anxious time for us all, and especially for the Procurator, for none ever knew in what fresh way their excitable spirits might

break out. And with two million or more of them massed within that circumscribed area, and liable to burst into flame if a spark fell, even unintentionally, upon the dry tinder of their patriotism or their perverse natures, Pilate had to walk very circumspectly, since he would be held responsible if any trouble came.

His position was the more difficult because, as you know, his patron, Sejanus, was in disfavour at Rome, and Pilate's enemies — of whom he made many by his brusque and overbearing manner — were, as he well knew, busily endeavouring to bring about his downfall.

He was not a bad ruler, and he endeavoured to hold the scales justly. But, truly, it was difficult among this strange people, at odds among themselves, yet united in the pride of a great belief that they were a unique race, destined by the one God whom they worshipped to dominate the whole world when the time appointed came.

They believed that appointed time close at hand, and they all looked eagerly and anxiously for the coming of the great deliverer and leader who should bring their mighty hopes to fruition.

Many such had arisen from time to time but

had been promptly suppressed, and I have seen the land bristling with the crosses on which their hopes ended.

Then came the young Teacher about whom you inquire. He was Jesus-ben-Joseph, and he came from Galilee — Herod's province, up in the north.

He was different from all who had come before him. And he had a foreteller and forerunner — a strange, wild prophet whom Herod slew. But before he died, this prophet, John, distinctly indicated the other — Jesus — who, by the way, was his own cousin — as the expected Deliverer.

The teaching of this Jesus-ben-Joseph seems to have been entirely good and towards the promotion of peace and good-will in men's hearts, and in no smallest degree subversive of, or inimical to, the Empire. But it cut across the old traditional religion of the Jews in many important respects, and that brought upon him the venomous opposition of the priests. You remember *them* and can appreciate the position.

You may wonder at my intimate knowledge of these matters, which, indeed, only came to me later. But that I will explain presently.

My father had rented a small estate outside the city — just a vineyard and a little house and some melon-patches and fig-trees — where we could spend the hot months when the narrow streets became unbearable.

And to it he had sent me with one of our servants a day or two before the Great Feast, with orders that I was not on any account to go into the city until the Feast was over and the crowds had dispersed. I think he feared trouble.

And it seemed that he was justified. For all through the night before the Feast the city growled like a hungry beast, and I was full of curiosity as to what was going on there.

Early in the morning we heard at times sharp outbursts of cries, as though the hungry beasts were quarrelling over their food, and I went out and stood gazing at the walls as though I expected them to burst suddenly asunder with the violence within.

I had promised my father not to go inside, but that did not restrain me from drawing as near as I dared.

And then, out of the Damascus Gate, opposite which I was lingering, there burst a bristling

crowd, like an angry flood through a gap in a dam.

In the middle of it I could see some of our soldiers keeping off the crowd from several malefactors bearing their crosses. A crucifixion, then, or several! And I watched all that passed eagerly.

I do not think I am naturally cruel or bloodthirsty. But at fifteen I was certainly more callous to other people's feelings than I am now. I had no idea what these men had done to deserve the cross — a ghastly punishment, as you know — and I did not particularly care. But as the crowd surged past me I was drawn along with it, like a leaf in the whirl of a torrent.

As it chanced, those nearest me were the roughest and noisiest of all. They jeered and cursed the prisoners as though they were their mortal enemies. Those inside were trying to hit with their sticks one of them who kept stumbling under the weight of his big beams. Those outside who could not get at him hurled stones and curses.

A Jewish boy alongside me picked up a stone and threw it, and missed. With really no intent but to show that a Roman could aim better than a Jew — for I knew nothing whatever about the

prisoners, except that every man's hand seemed against them, and therefore they must be getting only their dues — I picked up a couple of stones also, and hurled one at the man against whom the venom of the crowd seemed chiefly directed.

It was not a large stone, nor a sharp one, I am thankful now to remember, for my fingers had fitted comfortably round it as I hefted it before throwing. And it flew straight. It struck the man on the side of the head, and — and here is the amazing pith and core of my story — the man turned his head, and out of all that leaping, raging crowd he looked straight at *me* — as though in some strange way effect and cause were instantly united in his mind. And such a look, Sergius Paulus ! It has been with me ever since. Night and day I see it, and I shall see it till I die. But I could never make you understand all that was in it — sorrow, for me — gentle reproach, as though he asked why I had done it — no ill-will, forgiveness rather — and a strange desire for my goodwill. All those and very much more which I cannot put into words, for it was beyond my understanding.

But that look of his — in spite of the terrible

state he was in, covered with blood and sweat and mud, and clad only in a soiled white robe and a mock crown — shot right through me, deep into my very heart. For, you must know, in spite of his pitiful condition, there was about him a strange, gentle dignity which, as it seemed to me, set him apart from any man I had ever met. I cannot think of any man I know who, placed as that man was, could possibly have looked as he did. And, truly, compared with him, those who were baiting him seemed no more than mad apes.

The other stone dropped from my hand as his eyes sought and found me. I stood stricken, and let the crowd surge past. When I came to myself I was all alone. Then I pulled myself together and followed him, drawn by that look, and because I could not help myself.

The crowd was gathered on and about a mound, on which, after the hideous sound of the hammering, the three crosses were set up. I stood on the edge of the crowd and watched. The man I had stoned was the middle one of the three. I knew him by his mock crown, and, besides, there was that about him which made him quite different from the other two.

The titulus nailed above his head said, "THE KING OF THE JEWS," which did not convey any meaning to me, unless it might be that he was one more of the many who were continually raising futile little rebellions against the power of Rome.

Then suddenly the light of day went out and all was darker than the darkest night, and I confess I was terrified, as were all those about me. They had been jeering and railing at the man on the cross. In the darkness they fell silent, and some wailed and beat their breasts in fear.

How long that darkness lasted I do not know. There was in me a great fear that the light had gone for ever and that this was the end of the world, and I know that many of those near me feared the same.

It was evident that this in which we were all participating was not approved by the gods. And when, after a time that seemed interminable, the earth reeled and shuddered beneath us we were assured of it.

I knew for certain that it was all because of that strange man on the middle cross. And I had thrown a stone at him ! I was full of fears, and

many strange thoughts such as I had never known before were at work in me.

The man died there on his cross during the darkness, and it was many days before I could learn the truth about him, not, indeed, till the Feast was over and we returned to the city. I was very eager to learn who he was and all about him, but it would have been no use asking the people among whom I stood in the darkness, for they were all too terrified either to think or speak properly.

I wonder if you remember John Marcus, whose mother had a house on the Mount, where she always made you and me very welcome. Well, it is from him that I have learned all that I know about the man on the cross.

John and his mother knew him well, and were very full of his wonderful teaching and his almost unbelievable doings.

They were in the habit of going up into Galilee for the hot season, and there they had a little house on the hillside at Nazaret, the very next house to the one in which the Teacher — Jesus-ben-Joseph — and his parents lived for many years. So they knew all his friends, and they had met him; they

loved him very dearly, and they held him in the highest reverence. In fact, and in a word, they hold him to be the veritable son of their one God.

It is all very amazing. With the strange appealing challenge of that strange man's eyes ever before me, drawing me against my will, asking of me something that I did not understand, I was eager to learn everything I could about him. And I got from John everything he could tell me.

Both he and his mother assert — quietly, but without any doubt — that their friend, Jesus the Teacher, came back into the world after his death upon the cross. And very many here in Jerusalem — hundreds, perhaps thousands — say the same. They have seen him and conversed with him. They cannot all be lying. And as to John and his mother, I would stake my life on their truthfulness and freedom from guile.

Yet Longinus, the Centurion, assures me that the man was beyond all doubt dead before they permitted his body to be taken down from the cross. He saw the body put into a tomb, and the tomb sealed at the request of the priests. But when the tomb was opened, on the third day afterwards, the body was not there, nor has any trace

of it ever been found by the priests, who would have given half their possessions to get hold of it. But John and his mother and all these others say he has been back with them in that same body, bearing the wounds of the nails in his hands and feet.

Longinus, with whom I have spoken much of this matter, is a hard man, a very capable soldier, and a good judge of men. All that he witnessed at that crucifixion impressed him deeply. He holds, with absolute conviction, that the man Jesus, whom they crucified there, was more than any ordinary man. "In my own mind," he said to me slowly and weightily, "I am satisfied that he was a son of God." I do not think he quite understands what he means by that, but coming from such a man, it is very striking.

John and his mother, of course, say the same thing, and they do undoubtedly mean what they say and also understand what they mean.

They say, as regards his teaching, that even his closest followers never quite understood that the Kingdom he hoped to establish was not — as they had all believed — a new Kingdom of the Jews, but a new reign of their One God — a Kingdom

of truth and right-doing and good-will in the hearts of all men everywhere. Think that out and you will see what a wonderful change it would make in the world. He claimed to be the son of their God, Jehovah, and belief in and love for Jehovah, and in himself as Jehovah's son and representative, were the keys which would open for them the gates of this New Kingdom of God.

So much for his teaching. As to himself, they say that he was the noblest and gentlest and kindest and wisest of men, and that his whole life was given to good deeds.

With their own eyes they have seen him cleanse lepers with a touch, and with a word open the eyes of men born blind. And — they have seen him call back to life men who had been dead many days.

Why, then, you will ask, if his doings and his teaching were all so good, did they crucify him ? And the answer to that is a simple one.

You cannot but remember the priests here and their ways — rigid observance of their old laws and traditions to the very last letter, punctilious ceremonial, which had lost most of its meaning for the people, gross self-seeking.

The new Teacher stood for the very opposite of all these. There was not room in this small country for them both. So, to save themselves, the crafty ones plotted his death and brought him to the cross.

But if they hoped by that to end him and his teaching, never were men more deluded or doomed to disappointment.

The Teacher's followers scattered like sheep in dismay at his death. But since his return they have become very lions for courage, and their teaching of the New Kingdom spreads with every day that passes.

Yes, if you have read thus far, your friendly soul sees where I am in this matter.

The challenge of those great appealing eyes of the man with the cross has drawn my heart and soul to him. The more I learn of him and his way the more am I drawn.

Should the teaching reach Rome, as I foresee that it will, for it is spreading throughout the world, give heed to it, Sergius Paulus, for in it is a new and richer life than the world has ever known.

Forgive the length of this epistle. You asked. I have answered. I trust it will reach you safely.

Commend me, I pray, to your father and mother and your sister.

I salute you with all the warmth of our old friendship.

CHAPTER II

I was overjoyed to receive your letter, and still more at your continued interest in the matter that is so near to my heart — the good news of a great new hope for the world made possible by the coming of the Nazarene Teacher, Jesus-ben-Joseph, whom we, his followers, steadfastly hold to be the Christ, the long-promised World-Deliverer.

Your feeling in the matter I can quite understand.

Your interest in the wonderful young Teacher has been kindled afresh by what I told you, but you seem anxious on my account lest I should have too hastily discarded my old beliefs for these new and barely tested ones.

But you must remember that such beliefs as I had before were only such as had come to me through my forebears, without any choice or thought of my own. I had simply accepted what was told me by my elders and never thought of questioning them. Now, they seem to me very

inadequate and unsatisfying as a foundation and inspiration for one's life. And as to the hope they hold of anything beyond this life — well, you know all about that.

But as to your fear that I may have committed myself too hastily to this New Way, you must remember that between my throwing of that fateful stone and my letter telling you all about it and, very briefly, what followed, three years had elapsed. And those three years were the most wonderful and fruitful of my life. They are wrought into my very heart and soul, clearly and deeply as with the tool of a Heavenly Graver, so that no single detail will ever be forgotten by me.

If you will suffer my telling of it all — for that is always a joy to me, and you will not be, by many, the only one to whom I have told it — I have the hope that you too may see *your* way in it, and nothing on earth would give me greater joy than that.

You will remember how my father, always overburdened with the multifarious duties of his office, made me write regularly to my grandfather in Rome, and how at times, when it interfered with our pleasures, I loathed the writing. But now I have come to be grateful for that discipline. For

it accustomed me to set down anything in the day's doings which particularly struck me, and that habit has now served me well.

Since my grandfather died I have continued to make notes for my own use; and from these notes and my own deep recollections of these matters, I will compile for you a full statement of all that has brought me at last to a sure belief in Jesus of Nazaret as the Promised Deliverer — as the one hope, the only hope, for all mankind in this life and in the life to come.

If you deem it well, it would rejoice me greatly if you would let your sister, the Lady Pomponia, read it also.

That strange compelling look given me by Jesus, the great Teacher of Nazaret, when I had struck him with a stone as he went to his death, remained with me night and day.

All with whom I have spoken agree that there was at all times in his eyes a power such as they have never seen in any other man's. They say they were winning beyond belief, and drew men's hearts to him, in spite of themselves sometimes. They seemed to search right into one's soul. But,

just because of that, they could be very overpowering, even terrifying.

To men, and still more to women, who sought through him a better way of life, he was gentleness itself. But when, as had often happened, wily priests or lawyers came trying to trap him in his talk so that they might have cause against him, that searching look from his deep grave eyes was too much for them. For through his eyes there looked at them something quite beyond their or any man's comprehension, something so overpoweringly great and grave and mysterious that no words could describe it.

Sometimes one look from him sufficed and they went away abashed and confounded. If, with hardened hearts, they persisted, then with a few wise, simple words he would put them to rout, and those grave understanding eyes would follow them sorrowfully as they went.

Now you can understand how that look of his haunted me. I could not get away from it. All day long, whatever I looked at, I saw there that patient, long-suffering face with its marring of blood and sweat and dust, and its reproachful, wistful eyes. And whenever I woke in the night

his eyes and his face still looked out of the darkness at me.

I could not get away from them. They compelled me to follow and find out what they wanted of me, and why.

My seeking brought me to Longinus, the Centurion who was in charge of the soldiers at the crucifixion that day — that terrible day of earthquake and blackness, of which I told you in my former letter.

I told you also how Longinus summed it all up into the words, "I am satisfied that he was a son of God." And though I was not very sure that he knew exactly what he meant by that, it impressed me deeply, coming from such a man.

I liked Longinus and so did young John Marcus. And Longinus knew it and it pleased him. For he was a stern, strict man, a hard man, and generally feared, especially by the Jews, whom he held in great contempt, except in the case of young John, in whom, by way of compliment, he held that there must be a strain of Greek or Roman blood.

But after that day we both noticed a change in Longinus. He was as strict a disciplinarian as

ever, but his manner was less rough, even to the Jews, and he seemed to brood often over all that had happened on the mound outside the Damascus Gate.

As soon as the crowds who had gathered for their great Passover Feast had gone home we returned to the city, and I immediately sought out young John, to learn what he could tell me about the man whose eyes haunted me. For my mind and heart were so upset by this whole matter that I could sleep little of a night and felt sick and heavy by day.

I found John and his mother, Mary, at their house on the Mount, not far, as you will remember, from that of the High Priest. I told them all my story and asked them to tell me all they could about the man at whom I had thrown the stone. And I could not have come to a better source of information.

When I had told it all, Mary bent down and kissed me — as my mother used to kiss me long ago, and no-one since.

"Be comforted, my son," she said gently. "He understood, and he forgave you. Now he wants you." And truly, as she said it, the reproach

seemed to disappear from those haunting eyes, and in them there remained only the longing and the appeal.

I felt strangely comforted. I said eagerly, "Will you tell me all you know about him, Mary ? Who was he, and why did they kill him ?"

"They say he is the Christ — our Promised Deliverer — but, Cornelius, my mind is still much confused about it all. I know he was a very great and wonderful man, but there is a great deal that I do not understand. And, indeed, his own people don't seem to understand very much."

"Your Deliverer !" I stammered. "But . . . he is dead. How then —— ?"

"Nay," she said, "as to that I can tell you what I really do know," and her face glowed as from some inner light. "He is alive. He has been with us here — in this house. . ."

I could but stare at her in amazement.

"He has been here," she repeated. "He has met his chosen ones here. He has eaten here —— "

"But . . . Longinus assured me that he died on the cross out there, and that he saw him buried in Joseph's new tomb below the mound."

"He died on the cross, as we count death. And he was buried in Joseph's tomb. And that Sabbath was a day of black despair for all of us — the blackest any of us have ever known, for all our hopes in him seemed ended for ever. But when his people sought him, early the next day, the tomb was empty in spite of the priests' guard, and The Master was out and about. Mary of Magdala was the first to meet him, and she could not believe her eyes till he spoke to her. Then he met Salome and Joanna, and bade them tell the rest that he was going into Galilee and they were to meet him there. He met Simon, too, and two others. And late that night, when they were all here telling of these amazing things, The Master came in and spoke with them and ate with them. And he has been here again and again."

"It is beyond belief. . . Do you understand it all yourself, Mary ?"

"No. It is beyond my understanding or anyone else's, I think. Simon does not understand it all. Nor John-ben-Zebedæus. Nor even Stephanos. And they were nearest to The Master and knew him best. If they don't understand, how should I ? But there is something better even

than understanding. . . We know, though we do not understand. There are some things too big for us to understand. . . We do not understand the sun and the moon and all the stars. But we know that they are. And I know that Jesus-ben-Joseph was the most wonderful man I have ever met, and that since he died on the cross out there he has been in my house, and not once only — many times."

She saw in what a state of confusion I was. She had been eyeing me keenly, and presently she asked, "Where is your father ?"

"In Bithynia."

"And who has charge of you and the house ?"

"Varus, his freedman. He has taken Publius with him to do his writings."

"We are going up into Galilee, John and I, to our little house on the hillside at Nazaret. You shall come with us. You are looking white and tired. It will be good for you."

"Yes, I am tired, for since I threw that stone I get no sleep at night. I see the man's face and eyes everywhere. I would be glad to go with you."

"I will see Varus at once. He will let you go with us ?"

"Yes, he will let me go. He will even be glad. He does not know what ails me and would not understand if I told him. He said this morning that he must call in a doctor to me. But a doctor would understand no better. When will you go ?"

"Just as soon as Simon and John and the others decide to go. They gather here at my house, you see, and I cannot go till they do. But it may be any day, for The Master has told them to meet him up there."

It was a large house, and no better could have been chosen for the meeting-place of men still bewildered by all that had happened and above all things desirous of escaping observation. Built up on the slope, the lower outward portion had, I think, been used at one time for storing goods, for Mary's husband, Sala-ben-Mattatha, had been a wealthy trader to the East. There were several entrances down below there among the arches, and anyone who knew the ways could slip in unseen at any time.

Often, as I went in to seek John and his mother, I would meet the followers of The Master quietly making their way to the large upper room which

Mary had placed at their disposal, and where they lived and spent most of their time in prayer and consultation. For they were all still in a state of great bewilderment and still very fearful of the priests and their fanatical rabble.

Some of them I came to know by sight from meeting them so often, but unless John happened to be with me I knew no more.

But I recall very clearly how, as he was coming down with me one day, we saw, coming slowly towards us through one of the arched openings, a man and a woman, she leaning heavily on his arm.

"Wait for me, Cornelius," whispered John. "It is The Master's mother. My mother always likes to greet her." He sped away up the steps behind us, and I stood in the shadow while they passed.

The Master's mother ! She was clad in the dark garments of those who mourn, a sad and drooping figure, and she walked wearily with the help of her companion, who assisted her with loving care. The glimpse I got of her face showed it still beautiful, but worn and sorrowful and lined with the traces of all she had suffered in these later years. For, even before the cross on the

mound brought all her hopes to an end, her motherly heart must have been ever weighted with anxious cares for the son whom she, as I have been told, like all the rest, never quite understood.

They were still slowly climbing the steps and we looking after them — for the thought of all that that quiet figure meant to the world, if the belief and hopes of Mary and these others were true, stirred me deeply — when another came hastily in and brushed past us.

He was a sturdy-looking man, with grizzled beard and frank open face, though at the moment his bushy brows were knitted and his face was anxious and careworn. But there was something strong and rugged and trusty-looking in the look of him which drew my liking.

His sharp eyes caught sight of us in our dark corner. He said a word of greeting to John, glanced keenly at me, and went on up the steps.

"That was Simon," whispered John. "I like him best of them all. The one with The Master's mother was John-ben-Zebedæus. I like him too, but I like Simon best of all."

"Why do you like him best of all ?"

"I don't know," and he seemed to be delving into his mind for the reasons why he liked Simon better than the others, and presently he said, "he talks to me, you know, as though I were a man and could understand. . . But there's a great deal that I don't understand, and I don't believe he does either . . . or any of them."

"Your mother says there are some things we can't understand and that it is better to know than to understand."

"Yes . . . but I do like to get at the meaning of things, and there is so much that is beyond me in all this. Even Stephanos does not understand it all and there is not much that he cannot fathom."

Stephanos had been his tutor and mine. He was a Greek Jew from, I think, Pamphilia, and Mary had taken a liking to him and had befriended him ever since he came to Jerusalem. She gave him the use of a small room in her large house and made him welcome at their table whenever he would.

He was very clever, having been brought up among the sharp-witted Greeks. It was Greek he

taught John, and also that new quick way of writing, and logic, all of which Mary thought might be useful to him in his career as a lawyer. After you left, my father made me take up these studies also. He said that I also would find them of service when I became a Legate.

Everybody who had anything to do with him liked Stephanos. He was, I suppose, about thirty years old, tall and slightly made, and his face, which changed its expression quickly when he was speaking, was always very good to look upon, and his eyes had in them that radiant look which I came to recognize as a characteristic of those who had been close friends of The Master. He had a very warm heart towards everybody, which was no doubt why everybody liked him. And he had a very acute, and well-stored, and well-arranged mind, and could more than hold his own with any priest or lawyer who got into argument with him.

He had many pupils among the better-class families and was doing very well, when he heard, I think through Mary and John after one of their sojourns in Nazaret, of the new Teacher and his wonderful sayings and doings. He went up at once into Galilee to see for himself, and he never

came back except on occasional visits. For he gave up everything and joined The Master's followers. He became his very dear friend and one of his most ardent disciples.

CHAPTER III

VARUS, my father's freedman, whom he had left in charge of our household, made no objection to my going up into Galilee with Mary and John. He was, I think, even glad to be relieved for a time from that much of his responsibility.

He was afraid I might go down with the fever or something else. Mary's good standing was known to him and he thought the change could only be for my benefit.

So, a week or so later saw us on our way, Mary mounted on the handsome white ass which her husband had brought for her from Baghdad, and John and I walking alongside or behind her.

It was the best time of the year for such a journey, not too hot, and the country all aglow with the coming of the spring.

As we went out of the Damascus Gate, we passed the spot where I had stood that other morning when I threw the stone at the man whom I was now coming to think of as The Master, as John

and his mother always did. And then my eye went on to the mound where the crosses had been.

It all came back to me and for a moment made me feel sick. I saw again the great calm eyes looking at me with gentle wonder and reproach, and then Mary's words came back to me and I saw in them only the longing and the appeal, and I went on comforted.

And as we walked John told me all he knew about The Master and his doings. As he had said, he always wanted to get to the bottom of things, and up at Nazaret they had lived next door to one, Azor-ben-Azor, who had known Jesus-ben-Joseph nearly all his life, had played with him as a boy, had grown up with him, and had been his partner in his business as a carpenter.

"Was The Master a carpenter ?" I asked wonderingly.

"Yes, he was, and he was the best carpenter in all that country too."

"How strange !"

"Strange ? Why ? We all learn to do something, and his father was a carpenter."

"I have been thinking of him as a learned man — like your Scribes."

"He was a greater man than any Scribe that ever lived. . . But I don't know how or why. . . Do you know, Cornelius" — and his voice dropped almost to a whisper — "I saw him once bring back to life a man who had been dead more than a day ——"

I stopped and stared at him.

" — Yes, I know it sounds beyond belief. But it is true all the same. He, and Azor-ben-Azor, and Zerah, who is the sister of Azor's wife Zoë, and I, were out on the hills together when he saw the body being carried to a tomb down below. He hastened down, I think because there was only one woman following the bearers and he was sorry for her. And when he got down he found it was one of his old school-fellows. He just took hold of his dead hand and told him to come back. And the dead man sat up and Jesus gave him back to his mother, and she went nearly crazy with joy."

"But it is almost unbelievable, John," I said, "and if anyone else had told me that I would not believe it."

"I know. But we'll take you to Nain to see Arni for yourself. Zerah and Azor go often to see him. . . And he is not the only one. There

was Lazarus at Bethany. He had been dead four days. But when Jesus called him he came back and he's alive today. I've seen him, too."

"It is all very amazing. . . But what amazes me most of all is this — if The Master could do such things as that, why did he let them crucify him ? Why did he not save himself and confound them ?"

He walked on without speaking for a time and then said, "We have often spoken of that, Mother and I, and we cannot understand it. It is what anyone else with power such as he had would have done. . . But he was not like anyone else that ever was . . ." and presently, dropping his voice almost to a whisper again, he said, "I know some things about him, Cornelius, that no-one else knows, and they are almost too strange to talk about. . . I've told my mother, but she is the only one, and she says it is all beyond us. . .

"You know that The Master ate the last meal he ever had, in our house, with his nearest followers. That was on the night when the priests took him. We were all quite sure they would make an end of him the first chance they got, and we were full of fears for him.

"Well, I was sleeping in a little room alongside the big room where they were supping. That is to say, I was supposed to be sleeping. But I was so anxious about him, and I wanted so much to know all that might happen, that I could not sleep.

"I could hear them talking and talking, and I thought they would never stop. I suppose I fell into a doze, for I woke up with a start and heard them going downstairs. I jumped up. There was no time to dress. I just picked up the coverlet off my bed and threw it round me and ran down after them.

"They went across the brook to the Hill of Olives and I kept them in sight. Then he went on with three of them to a little enclosed garden and I crept along after them.

"He went aside by himself and I heard him praying. . . I never could have thought of him or any man praying like that, Cornelius," and his voice sank to an awed whisper so that I could hardly hear it.

"He talked with God as though he could see Him. He begged God to let him off something that was coming to him, as though it was something beyond his power to bear. . . I can hear his

voice yet. I tell you, it was terrible to listen to, Cornelius — the agony he was in.

"I hid my face in the earth, but I could not go away. . . I knew something dreadful was going to happen to him and I had to see.

"Then I saw lights come out of the city by the Priests' gate, and The Master stood watching them for a time. And then he went back to where his people were, and when they saw the lights bobbing along towards them, and understood that they were coming up to take him, some of them wanted to fight, and I crept closer. For if they had fought I would have helped him all I could.

"But he would not have that, and he went quietly down to meet them — a mob of Caiaphas's men and the Temple guards — and asked them what they wanted. When they seized hold of him, one of his people — it was Simon, I think — hit out with his sword and wounded one of them, in spite of what The Master had said, and he chided him for it and touched the man's wound and healed it.

"Then all his own people fled, every single one of them, Simon and all, and I was the only one left. I was following behind when one of the

priests' people made a grab at me. But I wriggled out and left the bedcover in his hands, and I fled too. For what could I do — against a crowd like that? The man who had my coverlet threw it aside. It was me he had wanted, not the coverlet, so I put it round me again and went on after them.

"They took him through the priests' private gate into Caiaphas's house, and I crept in behind them. They knew me there and let me in with the others. . . And then, Cornelius, a very strange thing happened.

"They had taken The Master into the inner room, and out in the courtyard they lighted a fire, for it was near the middle of the night and it was cold. I squeezed in between two others and sat and watched. And then, as I looked round I suddenly saw Simon there. When he had come back, and how he got in, I don't know, but there he was, and he was trying to keep out of sight as much as he could.

"Then — and this is the thing that surprised me so — one of the High Priest's servants caught sight of Simon and said to him, 'Why, you were with that fellow Jesus,' and Simon said he didn't know what she was talking about.

"He turned to go out of the door, and another said to him, 'Yes, you were certainly with the Nazarene. I saw you.' And Simon said, 'I tell you I don't even know the man.' But before he could get out, still another said, 'Of course you were with him. Your tongue betrays you. You are a Galilean like him.' And Simon cursed and swore at him, and said, 'I tell you I don't know anything about him.'

"And as he said it that third time a cock in a pen in one corner crowed very loudly. And — why, I don't know — Simon turned suddenly and stood staring into the inner room where they had taken The Master. Then his face went like the face of a dead man, and he put his arm up over it and pushed out of the door.

"What it all meant I don't know, but it has troubled me because it was so unlike Simon. He's a good man is Simon and it was not like him to do a thing like that."

"I suppose it was just that he was all upset by what had been happening and he was taken unawares."

"Yes, I suppose that was it," John said musingly. "The only lie I ever remember telling my

mother came over me like that. It was several years ago. I had knocked over a little glass bowl which she was very fond of and always kept in her own room. It had come from Greece, I think. And when she asked me suddenly about it I was frightened and said I didn't know anything about it. So she went and scolded Rhoda, the only servant who was ever allowed into that room.

"And Rhoda cried and said she had never touched it. And I lay on the floor and bit the mat — I was so sick with myself for telling that lie and getting Rhoda into trouble. And when I was going to bed that night I was so frightened lest I should die in the night that I told my mother all about it. And she was very wise. She whipped me for telling the lie, and made me go at once to Rhoda and tell her how sorry I was, but she forgave me for breaking the bowl. And Rhoda kissed me, and I've never forgotten it all."

"I expect Simon will be very sorry about it now, being such a close friend of The Teacher. And now The Teacher is dead he won't be able to tell him how it was."

"But he is not dead."

"I know you think so, John, but that is beyond me. Longinus is certain he was dead."

"Longinus doesn't know all that has happened since. He's a fine man and I like him, but he doesn't know everything, and he doesn't understand this matter."

"Do you and your mother ?"

"Not properly, but we know more about it than Longinus does, because we've heard it all from The Master's own friends."

We had so much to talk about that the way did not seem long. We stopped the first night at Beth-el, and the second at Sychar. And John, who had done that journey often before, pointed out many things on the way — told me the names of mountains and villages and what they were famous for. I remember Gerizim, with its ruined temple, and Ebal, and Jacob's Well — with a dead man on a cross close to it — and the Vale of Shechem, full of flowers and very beautiful, and the white walls of The New City in the distance. But I was very much more interested in all the things he could tell me about the Great Teacher,

whom he had known so well while he was alive, and to whose own home and country we drew nearer with every step we took.

Mary was generally in front of us, jogging along comfortably on the gentle white ass which knew the road well. Sometimes when we drew close to her she would join in our talk, but she was very full of her own thoughts about all this strange matter and as to what would come of it. She said she was hoping to get some light on it at Nazaret from The Master's greatest friends — Azor-ben-Azor, and Zerah, the daughter of Matthat of Kedesh. If anyone knew what was the meaning of it all these two would, for they had been closer to him, she said, than his own people, who, I gathered from some of her words, had always been much puzzled about him and never valued him quite as much as other people did.

Many more things John told me as we walked, and you can understand what a state my mind was in with it all.

It was not only their profound belief in all that had happened so recently that was so amazing to me, but also the strange and wonderful beliefs

which lay below it all like an unshakeable foundation, and which were as yet too new to me for my mind to feel at home in, as did theirs.

There was their one all-powerful God who, as far as I could gather, summed up in Himself all the noblest feelings and virtues of all other gods, Roman, Greek, and all others. They held that it was He who had created everything and directed everything, and that all through the ages He had had a special love and care for their race — which seemed odd, for as a race they were not generally much liked. Their God, said John, had always sent them teachers who told them what He would have them do.

That provoked me to argument, for it seemed to me that, as matters were at present, things had not gone too well with them. With such an all-powerful one behind them they ought to have ruled the world, and not be subject, as they were, to Rome or anyone else. We almost fell out over that. John could not but acknowledge that it was so, but he did not like it, and after walking in silence for a time, he said, "You're right, of course, Cornelius. We ought to be head of the world,

and perhaps if our forefathers had followed God's orders we would be. But they didn't. We may be yet, though."

"And now," I said, for I wanted to get as clear an understanding of it all as I could, "you say that The Master was the son of your God, and was sent by your God to be the Deliverer who had been promised to you. And he is dead, and you are as far from deliverance as ever. You are even farther from it, for he has come, and has gone, and you are still subject to Rome, and you cannot look forward now to his coming."

"But he is not dead," said John stubbornly, "and one who can bring dead men to life, and can come back to life himself, after Rome is quite certain she had put him to death, is able to conquer even Rome. . . But, truly, Cornelius, some of us are coming to believe that it is not Rome, or even all the world, that The Master came to capture — in the way you are thinking of — but the hearts and souls of all men everywhere. I remember once asking him if he had come to conquer Rome, and he said, 'There are greater Kingdoms than Rome, John. My Father's will is for the greatest things of all.' "

"It's too big for me to understand," I said.

"It's too big for anyone to understand — except The Master. But he understands, and I'm leaving it to him," said John stoutly. And there, since it was no good arguing about a matter which we both acknowledged to be beyond our understanding, we left it.

CHAPTER IV

It was as we drew near to Jacob's Well, not far from Sychar, that we came upon one sitting by the roadside, just below a cross on which hung the remains of a man, who, by the faded titulus above his head, had been a thief and murderer.

The man who sat below the cross looked very worn and weary and with little strength left in him. His face was lean and hollow, his eyes were wild and distraught, and his clothing was in rags. Mary's kind heart could never see trouble without wanting to relieve it.

"What ails you?" she asked gently, as she stopped the white ass in front of him.

He looked up heavily at her without speaking, as though his trouble lay so sore upon him that her words could not get through.

"What is amiss with you?" she asked again.

And this time he answered her, slowly and thickly — "It was I that was to die on the cross . . . and they nailed him there instead of

me. . . So God's anger is kindled against me."

We thought he was speaking of the dead man on the cross above him. And then John, who had been staring at him intently, asked, "What's your name?" and from his manner I thought he knew what the answer would be.

"My name? . . . My name is Jesus . . . Jesus-bar-Abbas. . . It was I that should have died on the cross . . . and he died in place of me."

"That was not your doing, Jesus-bar-Abbas," said Mary. "The High Priests would have it so. Theirs be the blame. But he is not dead ——"

"Not dead? . . . But I saw him die — there, where I ought to have died. And he looked at me. And now I see his eyes everywhere, looking at me. . . But that woman said he would come back. . ."

"What woman?"

"The woman at the cross, and she was there when they were burying him. She said he was the Christ and he would come back."

"And he has come back. The woman was right, whoever she was," said Mary.

"He has come back? . . . Where is he? I would find him. I would tell him that it was not

my doing that he died there instead of me, and then, may be, he'll stop looking at me like that," and he tried to rise, as though he would start at once in search of the man who had died in his place.

But he was very weak, and when he sank down again, spent, Mary got down from the ass, saying, "We will carry him into Sychar and see to his needs. It is but a little way."

So John and I lifted him onto the ass and we jogged slowly on into the town, and as we went we learned from his bits of broken talk that he had been wandering for days in the wild places, with scarce a bite to eat in all that time. And always, he said, the eyes of the man on the cross were seeking him out, and he feared them, and yet they drew him on.

"He wants you, as he wants all of us," said Mary. "And you will have no peace till you find him."

"Where shall I find him ?" he asked hopelessly.

But Mary could only shake her head. "We do not know, but he told us all to meet him in Galilee, and he will surely be there."

"Where ?"

"Most likely at the Lake," said John, "for that is where his followers will be."

"I will seek him at the Lake."

We took him to an inn in the town, and Mary gave them money and asked them to tend him till he was recovered enough to go on. And there we left him next morning, for it would be at least another day before he could travel and we could not wait.

John knew all about him, for he had been at his trial for a riot in which a man had been killed. But he said he was so altered, by his imprisonment and by all he had gone through since, that he had not at first recognized him.

Later on, after we had returned to Jerusalem, we learned that Jesus-bar-Abbas had indeed gone on to the Lake, and by dint of much asking had learned that The Master's home was at Kaphar-Nahum.

He had found his way there, and was there the day when the word flew round that The Master himself was on the hill not far from the town, and all the people flocked there to see him and he had spoken to them.

Of that I will tell you later, and how we after-

wards met Jesus-bar-Abbas in Jerusalem, and of the wonderful change that had come upon him by reason of all that he had gone through.

On the third day we climbed the northern hills of Samaria into Galilee, The Master's own country.

About mid-day we came through a great plain, bright with flowers, to a small town up on the side of a hill, which John said was Nain, where the young man lived whom he had seen The Master call back to life when he was dead. He said they always stopped there on their way to and from Nazaret, for it was not every day you could talk to a man who had been dead and had come to life again.

A steep stony way led up into the squat little town, and as we were clambering up it a man came out of the gateway with a hoe on his shoulder. At sight of us his thin dark face lighted up and he came quickly to welcome us, and turned and went back into the town with us, asking anxious questions of John and his mother.

"Is it true that they have killed Jesus there at Jerusalem? We have only heard rumours. Is it true?"

"Yes, Arni. They killed him," said Mary quietly. "But he has come back again."

"Of course. He brought me back. How could they keep him ? Where is he ?"

"We do not know. But he met his people in my house more than once — afterwards, and he bade them all come up here into Galilee where he would meet them again. So we are full of hope — though what is the meaning of it all ?"

"He knows," said Arni confidently. "Here is Mother," as a little grey-haired, eager-faced woman came running out of a house and fell on Mary with kisses. And while they all talked much and fast, I looked with great curiosity at what I had never expected to see in this world, and what indeed very few people have seen — a man who had been dead and who had been brought to life again.

He looked perfectly well and strong. His face, except when he was eagerly putting questions to John and Mary was grave, almost solemn, as might well be expected in one who had passed through such an unheard-of experience. And his eyes also were very grave and thoughtful.

John told me afterwards that he had never been

able to answer any questions that had been put to him about the time when he was dead, and that people had at last got tired of asking him.

His last words, as he came down the road with us to go to the vineyard, were:

"We shall hear more of him soon, Mary. Don't despair ! He is too great for the priests to make an end of."

It was near sunset when we came to the hill where Mary's house stood, looking down on Nazaret.

And as we were climbing slowly up to it, a man with a saw in his hand came out of the wide, open side of a larger house which lay a little way off the path. He stood for a second gazing at us, and then he called a word back into the house and came striding down to meet us.

"Azor !" shouted John, and ran and flung himself upon him, while from the house there came running two very comely young women and an older one, and two lively small boys and a bigger boy.

Mary dismounted from the white ass, which wandered on up the hill-path towards a smaller house, nibbling as it went. And as the others

gathered round her and John, the sound of their warm glad greetings and the eager questions and answers which passed between them all, made me feel lonely.

But that was only for a moment. John came running up and dragged me in among them, saying, "This is our friend Cornelius. He has come to stop with us," and to me, "This is Azor. And this is his mother, Miriam — and Zerah, and Zoë, and Azor, and Zadok, and Neri. Oh, but I'm glad to be back here, Azor !"

My heart warmed to them all at once, so frank and friendly was their welcome.

Azor-ben-Azor was a man of about thirty, tall and well made, with a fine, rather grave face, and deep thoughtful eyes which were very searching but yet very kindly. I liked him at sight and was wondering what it was that drew me to him so strongly, when, like a flash, I understood.

This gracious, kindly, calm-faced man had grown up in the closest love and friendship with Jesus-ben-Joseph, the Great Teacher, and in all those years of loving intimacy he had, I felt sure, grown very like him in all his ways and somewhat even in his looks.

Later on I asked John if Jesus and Azor were at all like one another to look at. And he said at once, "Yes, Azor is growing more like Jesus all the time, and many people have noticed it. You see," said John, "Azor grew to think of people and things as he knew Jesus would think of them, and I suppose that's what has done it. And that's why the folks down below come up now to ask Azor's advice about their affairs, just as they used to come up and ask Jesus."

I thought they were surely the most gracious and comely set of women I had ever seen. Zoë, Azor's wife and the mother of the two lusty brown-skinned boys, had a bright, laughing face and was I was sure, of a very happy nature. Her sister Zerah almost took my breath away with her exceeding beauty. Truly she looked to me like a goddess come down to delight and bless the sons of men for a season. And Miriam, Azor's mother, though she was, I suppose, past middle age, looked still young because of the sweetness of her face and the starry lights in her eyes.

But that was a feature I noticed in all of them, the soft glow of some inner light seemed to shine through their eyes.

John told me, when I said something like that one day, that their friend, Jesus, had just that same light in his eyes, and that he had somehow put it into theirs.

But this first time of them all meeting again was over-shadowed by all that had come to pass since they had last seen one another. They had much to talk about, and they all went into the wide, open workshop and sat down. The boy Neri went on with some work he was at, but listened to everything with a bright, intelligent face.

Mary and John told them how their friend, Jesus, had come to his followers in her house more than once since his death. And Azor said quietly that he had visited them also, there in his own old workshop where they were sitting.

Zerah and Azor seemed to me to have a much greater understanding of the whole matter than any of the others. John and his mother, while they accepted it all, and believed it all, said frankly that there was much that they could not understand.

And I remember Mary turning to Zerah and asking plaintively, "Do you understand it all, Zerah ?"

And Zerah, her large eyes shining like stars, said very quietly, but in a tone of deepest conviction, "I don't understand it all, Mary, but I know it is all true, for I knew him and loved him and he told me himself. Our friend Jesus was God's own son, and he came to us to tell us of his Father and of His love for us."

I sat in a corner staring and listening. It was very strange and all very new to me to hear such things spoken of in that way. It made a very deep impression on me. I would have believed anything and everything Zerah told me in that sweet deep voice of hers and with those wonderful stars in her eyes.

CHAPTER V

John took me up into the hills next day to some of his favourite haunts, and when we got back his mother said, "Azor has been up to tell us that The Master's mother is at their house. She is to live with John-ben-Zebedæus near Kaphar-Nahum, but she wanted to have a few days up here, where the happiest years of her life were spent. So don't go running in as you usually do, John. She is sure to wish just to sit and be quiet and think over those old days."

But a day or two later Azor came down to meet us as we were coming up the hill-path.

"Zoë happened to ask, this morning, why you never came in to see us as you generally do," he said. "And Mary got the idea that you had been told not to come because she is there, and she wanted to go back to Kaphar-Nahum at once. So you'd better come in, but don't stop too long, John. Her sorrow is still very heavy upon her."

So we turned in with him and I saw again the

mother of the Great Teacher, Jesus-ben-Joseph, whom these good friends held to be the actual Son of their one God.

She was sitting on a low stool among the sweet-smelling shavings of pine and cedar, leaning her back against the wall near two great bushes of rosemary, which were in flower and filled the whole place with their delicate pungent scent.

She was in her garments of mourning, and the idea came into my mind that she would wear them all her days.

I had only got a glimpse of her face as she passed us that other day, as she went up into Mary's house in Jerusalem. Now I found it as sweet and sad as I had imagined it, the eyes heavy-lidded with sorrow, the gentle mouth somewhat compressed as though to keep her suffering to herself.

She looked at us as we came in, and John went to her and fell on his knees at her knee, and I did the same because I did not know what else to do, and because my thought of it all, and of all she had gone through, was almost too much for me. Azor went on with his work, quietly smoothing what I took to be a yoke for oxen.

She smiled gently on John and smoothed his

rough hair with her hand, which was very small and shapely.

"You knew him, my son," she said very gently.

"Yes, mother, I knew him and loved him very dearly — as much as Azor loved him," said John, eagerly and earnestly.

"It is sad to lose him — so."

"But he has come back again. . . Many have seen him and spoken with him."

"My heart broke there at his cross, and all day long it breaks anew with its aching for him," she sighed softly.

"God sent him to help the whole world, Mary," said Azor, from the bench. "And he will do it. Nobody else could. It is a very sick world and no-one but Jesus could heal it."

Mary sighed gently again.

"I used to hang his baby things on those bushes to dry," she said. "Such a beautiful baby he was. . . And now . . ." her hands rose and dropped in a gesture of despair. "But he was always beyond my understanding, even when you and he used to go off into the hills together, Azor."

"Yes, we none of us knew the wonder that he

was. But we know now and his good work will go on." She sighed again and fell once more into her own deep thinking, and we slipped quietly away.

For a few days John was happy showing me all the country, and I was happy just to be among them all, sharing their simple life, and hearing much about the friend they had lost — and yet in this extraordinary way had found again.

Then John began to grow restless and unsettled. Great things might be happening down yonder by the Lake, and there grew and grew in him a great craving to be there.

For The Master had told his followers he would meet them in Galilee, and it was there by the Lake that most of them lived.

John's continual wondering as to what might be going on down there was as catching as a fever. We all began to feel the same — all except Zerah, who seemed to live in a rare sweet atmosphere of her own which no earthly matters could disturb.

Not that she was in any way aloof from the rest of us. She was the life and soul of the house down there, helping deftly in everything and add-

ing a grace and charm to all the pleasant ordered family life.

But I always felt, as I watched her, that she was possessed of something more than any of the others — of some great inward joy and hope which I had never seen in anyone else. Azor had something of it also, but Zerah much more.

I noticed one thing and could not make out what it meant. And that was the number of people who came up from the village to speak with Azor of an evening when his day's work was done. I supposed they came on business.

But one night when we were all together John's mother said to him, "I see they come up to you as they used to come up to The Master, Azor."

"Yes," he said, "they are just the same, most of them — always quarrelling among themselves and ready enough to seek advice, but not so ready to take it. . . And, you see, I have not the wisdom Jesus had. All I can do is to try to think how he would have advised them. But I've no doubt I often make mistakes. He never made any. When I am completely at a loss I ask Zerah and she never fails me. You see, she was nearer Jesus than even I was."

Perhaps it was John's constant harping on the idea he was so full of that unsettled The Master's mother, for Azor came up one morning to tell us that she was going back to the Lake the next day, and that he was taking her down.

"Beg her to use my white ass, Azor," said Mary. "It is very gentle and will carry her well, and we shall feel it an honour."

John jumped at that chance and knew no rest, nor permitted anyone else any, till it was arranged that he and I should accompany them, Azor promising to see that we got into no mischief.

We set off very early next morning, down the hill, and through the village, and across a plain bright with flowers and springing corn, with a lofty, round-topped, wooded hill on the right which John said was Tabor.

Mary's white ass had a very easy springy pace and we covered the ground quickly. Its rider had drawn her dark veil over her face and seemed lost in her sorrowful thoughts. She hardly spoke the whole way, and no doubt often fell asleep, as John's mother confessed she often did when mounted on the gentle beast.

It was still early in the day when we came in

sight of the Lake, gleaming like a great blue jewel in the gaps of the hills.

And as we came down towards a considerable town, which Azor said was Tiberias, we met a string of six little asses laden with panniers, straggling along up the winding hill-road.

"Peleg's Simon," said John, as soon as he caught sight of them; and round a corner we came upon their driver standing staring after Mary and the white ass.

"Hello, Simon !" cried Azor. "What now ? That is Mary. We're taking her home to Kaphar-Nahum."

"Will she sell that white ass ? It's a beauty."

"It's not hers, as you ought to know. It belongs to John's mother. You've seen it before."

"Ah then, I didn't know it was that one. . . And so," he said, staring at us with a curious knowing look, which seemed to me to say, "What did I tell you ?" . . . "It's all over !"

"What's all over ?" said Azor, brusquely for him.

"Why — our Jesus, and all his big doings."

"Over ?" and Azor fixed him with so straight and compelling a look that he was obviously

startled. "What do you mean by all over, Simon ?"

"Well — they've killed him down there, haven't they ? — and by the cross, too. It brings shame on the family. I always thought — "

"Jesus was with us a few days ago, Simon. He came into the workshop as we were sitting there and he spoke and ate with us all."

"Then — then —— But isn't he dead then ?" and his eyes seemed like to fall out of his head with amazement, and his mouth hung open.

"Dead ? — Jesus ? See here, Simon ! — You meet Arni of Nain sometimes. You know Joanan-ben-Joseph who was at one time filled with many devils. You know old Jabez who was a leper, and Timæus who was blind from his birth. And you know how they were healed, and very many besides. And you think the priests at Jerusalem could bind and hold him who could do such things ?"

"You've really seen him, Azor, since . . ."

"He came in and sat and talked and ate with us, I tell you. But many others have seen him also. So don't you go believing and saying that he is dead. He is not," and Azor turned and we

went on, leaving him all agape gazing after us.

"Simon is a great gossip," said Azor. "I would like all the world to know that Jesus is alive again."

We rested for a time just outside the town, and then followed a road which wound in and out round the flanks of hills, with wonderful glimpses of the great blue stretches of the Lake, till we came to Kaphar-Nahum, up towards the northern end, and to the large house right on the shore where Mary lived with her sister Mary, the wife of Clopas of Beth-Shunan.

As soon as he could, when we had eaten and rested, John drew me out of the house and along the road by the side of the Lake.

"I want to see Simon," he said eagerly. "I want to know if they have seen Jesus again," and he set off running.

But very soon we came upon half-a-dozen men launching a boat.

"That's Simon," panted John, "and Andrew — and John — and James. . . Simon, where are you going ?"

"Hello, young John ! What are you doing here ? We're going a-fishing."

"Will you take us with you ?"

Simon gave a look round the sky and a word or two passed among them, and then he said, "No, boy. Your mother's not here, is she ?"

"No, only Azor-ben-Azor. We brought The Master's mother back with us. Has anything happened ? Have you seen The Master again yet ?"

"Not yet. We are waiting for him. Tell Mary we will come along as soon as we get back in the morning." And they pushed off into the lake.

CHAPTER VI

VERY early next morning I was wakened by John, who whispered in my ear, "Be very quiet and come along and bathe," and in a minute or two we were running along the lake-side.

"I want to catch Simon as he comes in," panted John. "That's him out yonder," as he caught sight through the haze of a boat making slowly for the shore.

It was heading towards a little cove farther on, and we quickened our pace to get there before it.

As we turned the corner we were astonished to see a fire of driftwood burning on the sand and some loaves of bread beside it; and through the smoke and the morning thickness, we saw one standing there looking at the distant boat.

It did not require John's breathless whisper to tell me who this must be. There was something about that tall commanding figure — a grace and dignity beyond anything I had ever seen in any man — No, I cannot find any words to ex-

press it, but I felt it through and through me, and as John gasped, "The Master!" and fell on his knees in the sand, I fell on mine beside him.

The Master! I had only see him once before, as he stumbled along under the great beams of his cross that day, and then his face was caked with sweat and blood and mud. Now it was high and calm and very noble looking — the face of one who had come by the way of suffering to a peace which nothing could disturb, and full of loving-kindliness towards all men.

I was as breathless at thought of the wonder of it all, as was John. The Master had not looked round at us, but he knew we were there. For he said quietly, "Get more sticks, boys, and feed the fire. They will be hungry out there."

And as we jumped up and hurried about the shore picking up every piece that would burn, The Master called to the men in the boat, in a round, mellow voice that carried like a silver trumpet:

"Have you caught anything, lads?"

And someone replied, in a gruff disappointed growl, "Not a thing."

"Try once more. Cast on the right side and you will get some."

They were evidently disgusted with their bad luck, and not much inclined to try again. But after a grumbling discussion they dropped the net over the right side, and as the fire was burning briskly we stood and watched.

And as we watched, the boat became a scene of excitement, the men all leaning over that side and talking all at once. And then there was a splash and we saw the head of a swimmer making hurriedly for the shore, and presently John whispered, "That's Simon," and then the burly man I had seen in Jerusalem came plunging through the shallows, falling flat in his haste and struggling up and on again through showers of spray, till he fell on his knees at The Master's feet.

The sun was shooting long shafts of light through the breaks in the frowning mountains opposite. The Lake was a shimmer of silvery haze curling lazily upwards. I can still see Simon kneeling there before the gracious figure of The Master. The water was running in shining streams out of his hair and beard and clothes. His wet face, straining up at The Master's with rapt

but dumb devotion, and The Master's face bent down over him in loving welcome, with his hands on Simon's shoulders, were all like molten gold. I shall never forget it all.

Then The Master said, "Get me some fish, Simon. You must all be starving out there." And Simon jumped up and waded back to the boat, which was coming in slowly and heavily, and gave them a hand with the take, which was so great that it was a wonder the net did not break.

He came back with a couple of good-sized fishes and was about to throw them on the glowing pile of the fire, when The Master put out a hasty hand, "Kill them first, Simon." And Simon hit them on the back of the head with a piece of wood and then laid them on the fire.

The others, as they came ashore with the take (I heard them say there were over one hundred and fifty fishes in that net) each knelt before The Master and he laid his hand upon their heads. Then he said in simple friendly fashion, "Come and break fast !" and they all sat down in the sand and began to eat.

John knew them all by meeting them in Jerusalem. "That's John-ben-Zebedæus . . . and his

brother, James. And that's Andrew, Simon's brother . . . and Thomas . . . and Philip . . . and Nathaniel-bar-Tolmai."

Young John and I had crept away when they all gathered round the fire. But Simon had seen us and he beckoned us to join them. So we crept quietly back and sat down near to him, and he gave us of the fish and the bread.

The Master sat with us and ate also, but I was so overawed when I dared to think of it all that I could eat but little. For this wonderful man, with the calm, high face and starry eyes, who was sitting there within a few yards of me, and off whom I could hardly take my eyes, was very much more than a man, unless they were all mistaken. He was a god — the son of their great God, and he had without any doubt been done to death on that cross which I had myself seen him carrying. And yet there he was before me, eating bread and fish, and talking quietly to his friends of what he wished them to do when he had to leave them for good. When he lifted his hands as he ate, I saw the wounds of the nails in them, but the wounds were beginning to heal.

It seemed to me that he had sat down to eat with

us only out of fellowship. For long before the others had done he rose and began to pace the shore alongside us, speaking quietly to this one and that, and sometimes to them all. And the tenour of all he said was that their first duty must be to God and all the rest to their neighbours. "In my life and by my death I have taught that. You, in your lives and by your deaths, must do the same. Remember always, and teach all men, that I came to show how great is God's love for man and that His only desire is for man's happiness in this life and in the life to come."

Then he passed round among us saying a special word to each one of us. And when he came to John and me he laid a hand on each of our heads, and he said to John, "Bear witness of me, John!"

And when I looked up, full of awe, his eyes were smiling down into mine, right through into my heart, and there was no reproach in them now, as there had been that other time, and he said, very gently:

"My son, follow thou me!"

When he came to Simon he touched him and beckoned him to walk with him, and with his arm

over Simon's shoulder they paced to and fro at a little distance, and several times they stopped and faced one another and then went on.

One time Simon pointed at John-ben-Zebedæus and asked some question, and then they went on round the arm of the cove, and Simon came back alone.

One of them asked him what The Master had been saying to him. And after pondering for a time he said something like this — "That night when they took him, and we had all bolted in fear of our lives, I crept back and got into the court-yard of the house they had taken him to. I wanted very much to know what they were doing with him.

"I thought no-one would know me, and so I would be safe there. But first one, and then another, and still another, accused me of being one of his followers. And the first time I was so surprised and taken unawares that I was right on my beam-ends, and I swore that I knew nothing about him. And but an hour or two before, he had washed my feet and I had sworn to follow him to the death ! Then when the others said the same, I had to keep on the same line, and three times I

swore that I knew nothing of him — of him, my Lord and Master ! When he looked round at me from the inner room, I fled out into the night, despising myself and in great despair.

"Now, this morning, three times he asked me if I loved him. And three times I dared to tell him that I did. And the first time he said, 'Feed my lambs !' And the second time he said, 'Shepherd my sheep !' And the third time he said, 'Feed my sheep !' . . . Three forgivenesses and three commands he gave me for my three denials. For one does not give commands unless one trusts. Now, I give my life to him till death, and may my death be like his — for the saving of men !"

They all sat silent, for he spoke with very great feeling. And presently one asked, "What was it you asked him about John ?"

"When he had told me three times what he wanted me to do, I asked him what he required of John-ben-Zebedæus, and he said, 'If I choose that he live till I come back, what is that to you ?' But what he meant I do not know, for then he led me round that corner, and before I knew — he was gone."

We helped them to carry that great load of fish

to the village, and Simon gave us one each to take home, bidding us tell Mary, The Master's mother, that they would come along as soon as they had cleaned themselves.

Azor was full of regret that he had not been with us, but he treasured the memory of the visit The Master had paid them in his old home at Nazaret, and was always greatly comforted by it.

I liked him more and more, and it was now, after seeing The Master himself, that it seemed to me that there was a certain likeness between them. And I thought that it might be that, by reason of their very close friendship, Azor had absorbed a great deal of The Master's spirit, and so, both inwardly and outwardly, had come to be like him. And when I said something like that to John one day, he said it was so and many had said the same.

We stayed three days and then, as nothing more happened, Azor said we must get back home, as he had much work on hand and could not keep people waiting.

We had been back but two days when, one evening as we sat in Azor's workshop, and he was telling us of the days when The Master and he were boys and rambled about the hills together,

we saw Simon — the man we had met with the six little asses the day we went to the Lake — going past along the path to our house.

"Hello, Simon? What's the news?" asked Azor, and he turned in and sat down on the big bench. He seemed to me rather a stupid fellow but felt himself at the moment of importance because of his message.

"Simon-ben-John stopped me — you know, the fisherman who made that big haul the other night, the biggest catch that's ever been made on our lake and the biggest fish, too . . ."

"Yes, get on! What did Simon want with you?"

"He told me to come up to your old house and see Mary from Jerusalem and her boy, John. . . Will she sell that white ass, do you think?" and he looked vaguely at John and me. "I'd give her a good price. . ."

"She won't sell it, Simon," said John. "You see, my father bought it for her in Baghdad, and he's dead. What was it Simon said?"

"Well, I was to tell you that Jesus — that's my cousin, you know — has been back again — day before yesterday. . ."

"Where, Simon? Who saw him?" jerked John and Azor together.

"Hundreds of folks. It was on that hill where he used to sit and talk to them, the one not far from our house. As soon as it was known he was there all the town ran out to see him. There's no doubt about it now," he said, scratching his head bewilderedly, "but how he does it, and what it all means, is beyond me. For we certainly heard they'd killed him down there in Jerusalem — just as we always expected they would."

"And what else did Simon tell you?" asked Azor, who evidently knew the man's rambling ways.

"Oh — ay! Well, he said Jesus told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait his further orders there. He thought you'd like to know."

"Yes, indeed! Thank you for coming and telling us, Simon. I must go and tell the others," said John, and he ran along to the other house, where Zerah and Miriam and Zoë were sitting spinning and talking with his mother.

When Mary heard the news she said at once, "If they are all going they will need me. But, oh, I am always sorry to leave you all. There is

something about Nazaret . . . Yes, it is better than Jerusalem. But we must certainly get back there."

The thought of going back to Jerusalem was a great blow to John and me. At Nazaret we had perfect freedom, both of body and of mind. The days were full of delight, and Zerah and Azor and all the others were a great joy to us.

We would have liked nothing better than to live the rest of our lives there. Whereas the thought of Jerusalem lay like a cloud upon us — a cloud black with thoughts of the past and heavy and threatening with thoughts of the future.

But when Azor saw what was in us he took us to task in his quiet wise way.

"What was it he said to you at the Lake, John ?"

"He told me to bear witness of him."

"And you, Cornelius ?"

"He said, 'My son, follow thou me !' "

"And now he is going to Jerusalem," he said, with a smile so full of meaning that our eyes were opened, and we saw where our duty lay and wondered that we could ever have wished otherwise.

"His great work is beginning," he said confidently. "You will have your share in it. Bear

yourselves like his men ! — for greater master never was."

And — as John told me afterwards, and as I told him — at that saying we each felt suddenly filled with a new idea of what life held for us and of what The Master required of us.

"My son, follow thou me !" — I heard again the very tones of his voice. And I saw again the look which had gone right through into my heart, that pearly morning by the Lake.

And I knew that I must follow him — right to the end, wherever that might be.

CHAPTER VII

A DAY or two before we left Nazaret we were all sitting one evening in Azor's workshop, and though the glow of the sunset was making everything look as if it had been dipped in molten gold, there was something of a shadow upon us.

What might happen when we got back to Jerusalem we could not tell. There The Master had promised to give his followers their final orders. He had impressed upon them, and upon all who listened to his teaching, that this New Way of his would be no easy way, and they must be prepared for that.

And the temper of Caiaphas and his party when we left showed what might await us when we got back.

"You are happier here, Zerah," said John's mother, wistfully. "Jerusalem can be very unpleasant when it is upset; and Joseph Caiaphas is a venomous man. . . I wish we could live always up here with you."

"And often I wish I could be in Jerusalem, or anywhere where I could be of more service to our Dear One. But he told me to wait here, so I wait."

"We don't know what is going to happen next," Mary said, with obvious foreboding that though there might be great things to come there would almost certainly be unpleasant ones also.

"He told us, that day on the hill by Kaphar-Nahum, that troubles would surely come — do you remember, John ?" Zerah said thoughtfully.

"I remember. I put it down. He said a lot of queer things that day, and I've forgotten some of them. But I remember — 'Blessed are they which are persecuted.' It seemed so odd."

" 'Persecuted for the sake of right,' " said Zerah, "and he added a promise — 'The Realm of heaven is for them,' — a wonderful promise ! . . . the Realm of heaven ! He said too — 'Blessed are you' — meaning us who were listening to him — 'when men denounce you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my sake; rejoice in it ! exult in it !' — and then his great promise again — 'for your reward is rich in heaven. . .' His teaching that day was full of

strange things like that, which remained in one's mind. I've forgotten some, just as John has, but a good many keep coming back to me. I've always been sorry you weren't with us, Azor. You would probably have remembered more."

"Yes, it was the day Naggai's old house fell down and I had to stop and dig them out from under it. . . Now, who is this coming ?"

And, looking round the wall of the workshop, I saw a woman coming up the hill-path. She was tall and dark and very good-looking, and came striding along with a strong, free step. When she saw us all sitting there she seemed to hesitate a moment, and then turned in towards the house, and Azor stepped out to greet her.

She stopped and stared at him and then said:

"You must be Azor-ben-Azor. I can see a likeness in you to him we have lost."

"Yes, I am Azor-ben-Azor. And you —— ?"

Then John's mother came hurrying out and gave her greeting — "Why — it is Mary of Magdala ! . . . I have not seen you, Mary, since —— "

"Since the day he came out of his tomb and spoke to me — to me first of any of them," she

said, not boastingly, but yet, it sounded to me, with simple, joyous exultation.

Zerah and John and I had come out behind Mary, and Zerah went up to the other Mary and kissed her warmly on both cheeks.

"You were indeed highly blessed, Mary," she said. "And it was meet. You loved him very dearly."

"And I had cause — none greater. He saved me — from myself. If I could, I would have died for him. . . Is his mother here ?"

"No. She was, but she went back to Kaphar-Nahum five days ago."

"I am sorry. I was there last week seeking her, and they told me that she was here. But I could not come at once. I have something to show her," and she brought from the breast of her robe a small flat packet wrapped in fine white cloth. She opened it tenderly, reverently, and we saw a stained white garment.

I heard Zerah catch her breath in a stifled sob and saw her face go white. She knew what it was, and it brought back to her with overpowering force the greatness of her own personal loss.

But she was herself again in a moment. I know

now, from what Azor has since told me, that she had within her a knowledge and understanding of The Master's heart and mind such as had, perhaps, been vouchsafed to no other. And, because of that she possessed an inward peace which nothing could now disturb. She had passed through deep waters but stood now on the firm ground of her perfect trust and love.

"You know it ?" said Mary of Magdala.

"Yes," said Zerah softly. "It was here his mother spun and wove it for him. . . He and she were both so proud of it. . . I remember so well the day she tried it on him and called us all to see how well it fitted. She will cherish it. . ."

"Nay ! It is mine and I will never part with it. It is all I have left of him," and she told us how she had bought it from a Roman soldier in Jerusalem when he was haggling with an old Jew over the price of it.

"They had flung it over his poor shoulders after the scourging," said Mary. "And at the cross they cast dice for it — I saw them. For it is all of a piece, you see, and they did not want to divide it. . . It was all stained and soiled when I got it. The soilure I have brushed off. But the stains

. . . they are himself and I dare not touch them. . . Himself !" she said, with great emotion, "Ah — how could they ? How could they ?" and her sobs shook her.

Zerah kissed her very tenderly, and put her arm round her, and led her into the house.

She stayed two days with them, rejoicing greatly to be living in the very house where her much loved Master had spent the greater part of his life.

They all took to her, Miriam and Zoë and the boys, but Azor and Zerah especially, and Zerah most of all, for between her and Mary there was the golden bond of their devoted love for the one who had been all-in-all to each of them, though in different ways.

As I sat there with them all, and watched them and listened to all that passed, I could perceive the difference between their feelings for The Master, though it is not so easy to describe it.

Both, I was sure, would gladly have laid down their lives for him, if that would have saved his life. But Mary of Magdala's love for him seemed to me very largely passionate gratitude for the great deliverance he had accomplished in her, and a wondering and reverential awe. He was her

Saviour, her highest and holiest one, and her belief in him had become part of her very self, but I do not think she understood him and all that he meant to the world, as Zerah did.

For Zerah seemed to me an altogether finer and rarer nature, just as in herself — in her outward appearance, I mean — there was something surpassingly sweet and lofty. And even I could perceive that she was possessed of more of what I was beginning dimly to comprehend as the spirit of The Master, than anyone I ever met.

Later on Azor told me more of that sweet and close companionship between Zerah and The Master, which they had all hoped might result in a still closer union — until they came by degrees, though not as quickly as Jesus himself had done, to a realization of his true nature and mission in life.

In that realization, and the consequent necessary surrender of their hopes, they had, said Azor, both suffered intensely. But suffering was The Master's accepted portion. And in Zerah it had made her what she was, the sweetest, and most gracious and entirely wonderful woman one could possibly conceive of. Through it she had come to look on

men and women and things as she knew Jesus would have done, and that had refined and exalted her heart and her mind till they were very like what one could believe his were.

Mary told us much of what she herself had seen and heard of The Master's doings and teachings, for, together with other women of means, she had been of the company which followed him about in his nearer journeyings.

I remember her telling of that great marvel when, in the desert on the farther side of the Lake, The Master had, with but five loaves and two fishes, fed five thousand men and women who had followed him out of the towns, and had forgotten to take anything to eat with them. She had seen him do many other wonders, but that one seemed to stand in the front of her mind. For she had herself eaten of the bread and the fishes, and her hunger had been satisfied as was everyone else's, though how they did not know.

Zerah and Azor and John had seen the still greater marvel of the calling back to life of Arni of Nain, and I myself had seen Arni alive and well. And the others had heard of that wonderful feeding of the five thousand, but hearing of it from

Mary's own lips made it very real to us and we could only marvel at it all.

Many other things Mary told us, and sitting among them and listening to it all, I came to feel almost as though I had actually been in The Master's company with them and had seen and heard as the others had done.

Another thing I remember her saying was that, no matter how great the crowd to which The Master might be speaking, everyone in it afterwards averred that it was at himself or herself that he looked as he spoke, and that that straight searching look of his seemed to go right into their hearts and carried his words in with it, and that then that look remained with them and kept his words alive in them. How well I knew that look !

I noticed that Zerah always spoke of The Master simply as "Jesus," and her voice was always wonderfully soft and sweet as she said the word; but Mary always spoke of him as The Master. And that seemed to me a small but significant sign of their different relationship to him.

But, as I have said, their common love for him was a golden bond between them. And when, on the second day, we saw Zerah taking Mary up the

hill, Azor nodded his head and said, "She is showing her some of his favourite places. That means they are good friends."

Zerah's room was the most sacred place in the world to her, for it was the one Jesus himself had always used when he lived there, and it was full of most precious memories of him.

She held that there was that about it — an atmosphere, a virtue, which told upon all who used it — worthy or unworthy — and that no-one could sleep there without being the better of it.

For there Jesus had spent the night watches in sleep, in prayer, in thought beyond the thought of man, in valiant wrestlings with his humanity. It was there that he returned from his long nights on the hill-tops alone with God — there that he shaped himself to his Father's will as it gradually disclosed itself to him.

Zerah said that the very walls spoke of him, but more to some than to others. Only for very good reason would she yield it to anyone. But when she perceived the need she gave it gladly.

His mother had, of course, had it when she came to stay with them. But whether it had soothed her grief or made it more poignant by the mem-

ories which it recalled, Zerah could not be sure.

She insisted on Mary of Magdala using it. But she said afterwards that she heard her catch her breath when first she went into it, and she went straight to the simple bed and knelt by it with her face in her hands.

Zerah went quietly away and left her there, and there on her knees she found her in the morning, and the bed had not been used.

"I dared not," said Mary simply. "It was happiness to me to kneel by it and to sleep on the floor beside it. And I slept sweetly and soundly — better than I have slept in many a softer bed." And Zerah understood.

She considered whether she should not for the next night give her another room and a bed on which she would sleep, but decided that it might wound Mary's feelings, and so she left her there, and Mary slept on the floor, but, by the look on her face next morning, she had slept well.

When the time came for Mary of Magdala to go, and we were all taking leave of her, she drew out from the bosom of her robe the little white packet containing The Master's meil and offered it to Zerah, pressing her to take it, warmly, and yet

with hesitation and regret that she could not entirely hide.

But Zerah kissed her very lovingly and said:

"No, dear, it is yours, and I know just what it means to you. Keep it always in remembrance of him who is so dear to us," and she put it back into Mary's bosom and then went down the hill with her.

For herself, I knew by this time that Zerah needed no outward symbols of him who had been so much to her. He was in her heart, supreme and for ever.

The next day, very early in the morning, John and his mother and I set off for Jerusalem, very doubtful as to what might await us there and, in spite of our knowledge of where our duty lay, wishing much that we could stop in Nazaret with these friends who had become so dear to us.

CHAPTER VIII

Varus was very glad to see me home again and none the worse. Indeed he said the journey had done me good, and Mary and John stood high in his estimation.

For myself, though I still found it all very bewildering, I felt the working of this new thing in my life — this great new thing which, while all the meaning of it was still beyond me, was still all good.

You see, my life had of late been rather empty. For I was not quick at making friends, and whenever I had managed it among those of my own race they always moved on, either to Rome or to some other part of the Empire. I had had my studies, of course, under different tutors and governors, for I was to train for the law and in time become a Legate like my father. But I had no particular wish to be a Legate, and I found the law very dull reading.

As to the deeper things of life, you know how

hollow and unsatisfying we always found them even as boys. And that dissatisfaction had grown upon me since you left, for I had had no-one to talk things over with, and my mind was all in a gloomy tangle, and life seemed to hold nothing worth striving for. As for anything after this life, we knew nothing and expected nothing.

You can then imagine how different everything was with me since I threw that stone at the Great Teacher, and got that haunting look in return, and how all that had happened since then had been like veritable new life to me. I was thinking and feeling, and proving as true, things which a short time before would have been unbelievable to me.

As it was — and I can never be too grateful for it — they were brought home to me in such overwhelming ways that it was impossible for me to doubt the truth of them.

In the new light of what I had seen and heard, life took on a new meaning for me, a tremendous meaning, the heights and depths of which were entirely beyond me. But whatever they were, and wherever they might lead me, I knew that I had to follow to whatever the end might be.

I knew very little, next to nothing indeed, of the

religion of the Jews, except that they believed in and worshipped only one God, whom they looked upon as exclusively their own God and supreme in the world.

But, in the wonderful way in which I have told you, I had come to know something, at all events, about one whom my new friends accepted as the son and representative of their God.

I had come closer to him than most. In his hour of trial I had wounded him. In his hour of triumph he had shown me that I was forgiven. I had seen him go to his death. I had met him and sat with him at meat, and been spoken to by him, marvellously come back to life. I felt always the benediction of his wounded hand upon my head, and heard always his clear, sweet voice, "My son, follow thou me !" And in the great grave eyes that looked right into my heart I saw his longing desire for *me* — for *me,* Cornelius Pudens Flaccus — a startling and astounding thought.

I do not doubt that he longs for everyone in just that same way, but to me it had been permitted to see it in his own eyes and to hear it from his own lips.

Whither this great change in my life might lead me I did not know. It was bound sooner or later to lead to cleavages, and probably, nay almost certainly, to violent discomfort with my father. He was a good Roman and a highly-esteemed officer of the Empire, but, like the rest, he cared for no such things, and, as far as I knew, never gave them a thought.

More immediate trouble I expected might come from Varus, in whose charge my father had left me. He was a clever and entirely trustworthy man or he would not have been where he was.

He was, as a matter of fact, an alien. His grandfather had been a man of position in Britain, the island discovered by Cæsar off the coast of Gaul on the outermost edge of the Empire, and was brought by him to Rome. Varus himself preserved the characteristics of his race — the clear fair skin, blue eyes, and brown hair, and my father had such confidence in him that he had left all his household affairs in his hands for many years past. But of his beliefs, if he had any, I knew nothing.

It was a surprise to me then, when, a day or two after my return, he said, "I've been hearing some

strange things about that Jewish teacher the priests got Pilate to put to death just before you went away."

"Yes? . . ." I wondered if this was his way of letting me know that he had learned of my connection with the matter, and of finding out where I had got to.

"Yes. Longinus can't get over it all. He says he was the most extraordinary man he'd ever come across. . . Indeed, he says more. He says he is sure he was more than a man. People are saying that he has been seen alive about the city since he was put to death. And Longinus has been looking into that, for he swears he was dead before he let them take him down from his cross, and he's not the kind to make any mistake in a thing like that. It's all very surprising. . . From all accounts he was a good man too, and never intended any harm to anyone. But he got at odds with the priests and they worked his end."

Now if Varus had spoken to me, a month before, in any way which suggested that he was seeking to pry into my doings, I would simply have gone into my shell and said nothing.

But now, and about this matter, I could not.

It would have felt to me like Simon's denials of his Master. I would have felt myself a coward.

I said, "Longinus is right, Varus. The Teacher was very wonderful and he was more than man. I saw him myself up there in Galilee."

"You did !" And his face was alight with eagerness. "You saw him — alive ?"

"I even ate with him and spoke with him."

"Tell me ! I would know more about him."

And, knowing him so well, and perceiving that he really meant it, I told him all that had happened at the Lake, and how The Master had also since his death visited Azor and his friends at Nazaret. I told him too how I came to be drawn into it all by throwing that stone outside the Damascus Gate.

"It is all very amazing," he said. "Have you told Longinus ?"

"I've not seen him yet since I got back."

"You'll find him very keen about it all. . . And — I don't know if you'll have the chance of noticing it, but I notice it because I've been seeing so much of him — he's been a different man lately, ever since he had to do with that man — The Teacher."

"How different, Varus ?"

He considered for a moment how best to express what he felt.

"Well — he was always a hard man, you know, rough and brusque, especially to these Jews, whom he has always disliked. Now he is not like that. He no longer treats them like dogs. That man made a great impression on him. He says he was the bravest man he ever met. And because of him he feels better to all the rest. . . Except the priests who did that other to death. If Longinus got his hands on them I'd be sorry for them. He says they're poisonous."

The amazing fact of The Master's reappearances since his death had spread through all the city and to many of the surrounding parts. The people were deeply stirred by it, and talked much about it.

To very many, the hurried execution of one whom they looked upon as a great prophet and teacher, who had never done any harm and certainly much good, had been a great shock. The high-handed — and as some did not hesitate to say, illegal — proceedings of the High Priest and his creatures had created a very bad impression.

The priests' party tried their best to counter this.

They spread the report that The Teacher's followers had stolen his body from the sealed and guarded tomb. But few believed them and feeling ran high. And they threatened anybody who should in public profess any views contrary to their own.

The Master's followers accordingly continued to meet secretly in that big upper room in Mary's house, and John said they always kept the door locked. And they spent most of their time there in quiet thought and talk and prayer, while they waited for their leader's next call to service.

Some of them, John said, still had the hope that whatever that call might be it would lead at last to the restoration of the Jewish people to their rightful place at the head of the nations. But some of the others, like Simon (I mean Peter. We're to call him that now), and John-ben-Zebedæus had come at last to believe that the Kingdom The Master intended them to found was a higher and larger one in the hearts of men all over the world.

Then one day John Marcus came running into my room when Varus was there, and at sight of Varus he stopped short, though he was obviously bursting with some great news.

I said, "It's all right, John. Varus feels about it all as we do. What is it now ?"

"They've met him again," he panted. "Simon — I mean Peter — says he came to them in our room yesterday and told them to follow him. And where do you think it was to, Cornelius ? It was across to the Olive Orchard, to the very place where I followed him that night the priests took him — where he prayed — as I told you. Then he told them again just what they were to do, and that before long they would be given new powers for their work, and they were to wait here till that came to them. And then Simon said — I mean Peter — that a cloud came down on the hill and he disappeared in it. And while they were still staring and wondering, they saw two men all in white, who asked them why they were looking like that, and then told them that as they had seen The Master go up into heaven they would certainly see him come down out of heaven again. And they have all come back very full of it and feeling much better than they have been doing."

"It is all very amazing," said Varus. "We seem to be living in strange times."

"Yes, it is all very amazing," I said, "and the

more you try to think it out the more amazing it becomes. . . Mary and John and Simon and all his other followers say that this wonderful man, Jesus-ben-Joseph, the Great Teacher, was really the son of their God — their only God, whom they worship as the Creator of all things and of all men. And they say that he came and lived on earth as a man to show men how to live as their God would have them, and to draw their hearts back to Him. . . And the men he came to help killed him !"

"It is very amazing," said Varus again, "for if all they say about him is true he could have ended them all with a word — and yet he let them do him to death. . . By the cross, too !"

"He did not come to kill people," said John bluntly; "but to make them live. I don't understand much about it but I do know that."

"What I can't understand," said Varus thoughtfully, "is how his letting himself be killed is going to help the people to live as their God would have them.

And that we could none of us explain.

CHAPTER IX

We all waited in great expectation and wondered much what would happen next.

"They have been choosing one to take the place of Judas of Kerioth," said John, one morning when I had gone up to his house to seek him and news.

Who is Judas of Kerioth? And why do they need someone to take his place? — for up till then I had never heard of him.

"Because he's dead. He hanged himself. You see, he was one of The Master's followers, but somehow, just at the end, he went wrong. Simon — Peter — says the devil got hold of him. Anyway, and whatever his reasons, he went to the priests, that night when they all supped in our house, and told them where they could find him and helped them to take him."

"But how could he bring himself to do such a thing, John? — one of The Master's followers?"

"I don't know. We none of us know. It's just one more of the things we cannot understand.

My mother thinks that it was probably because Judas had always been one of the keenest of them for The Master to proclaim himself The Deliverer; — they were all hoping for that, you know — and when he came at last to see that that was not The Master's intention, he either went mad, or thought he could bring it to pass by forcing him on against his will.

"You see, it really looked as if it might come, that day The Master came in riding on the ass's colt, and all the people cheering him, and we were all very hopeful. And then, when nothing came of it, we were all greatly disheartened, and that may have made Judas do what he did. Anyway, he's dead, and they've chosen Matthias to take his place.

"And we're glad, for he's a very old friend of ours, and he knows more about The Master's teachings and doings than almost anyone, for he has followed him everywhere for the last three years."

NEVER shall I forget the day when The Master's promise to his followers of a new and mighty gift of power was fulfilled to them.

It was another of their great Feast Days — the Feast of Pentecost. I have set down here all my recollection of all that happened that day as fully and clearly as possible, for it proved to be one of the vital days in the upbuilding of the New Way — the unforgettable day. But still the day that counts for most in my mind in this whole matter is the one on which The Master came back triumphant from the dead. And the more I think on that, the more it means to me.

Mary and John still went up to the Temple services and observed the rites of the Jewish law. But their hearts were estranged by reason of the ill the priests had done The Master, and they did nothing more than was absolutely necessary.

They had asked me to come up very early, to eat with them some of the special bread made of that year's earliest wheat, and the first gathered fruits.

Since I had come to know them and their friends, Azor and Zerah and the rest, so well, all their curious ceremonials and observances had become of great interest to me. For The Master, whose life, and death, and after-life were working so great a change in me, had been one of them-

selves, and had done all these things like the rest of them.

When I asked them, as we ate, what was the meaning of this Feast, they began to tell me between them.

"It is our Thanksgiving Feast for the coming of the harvest," said John.

"It commemorates the giving of the Law on Sinai, fifteen hundred years ago; the Law that made us a people apart," said Mary.

And John added eagerly, "We were to be the greatest nation the world had ever known —— "

"But we forsook the Law and lost our heritage. . . Now we are broken and scattered over the whole world. But, as you know, we have all and always been hoping for a great Deliverer who would set us in our rightful place again . . . and we hoped we had found him in The Master. It has been a grievous disappointment to us after all our hopes."

She seemed so like to weep, that I asked hastily, "What was Sinai? And who gave you the Law?"

"Sinai? . . . The Law?" — as though ignorance of such vital matters was impossible to con-

ceive of. But when she had got over her surprise and remembered that I was a Roman, she proceeded to enlighten me.

"Our people were captive in Egypt, when Pharaoh was King, fifteen hundred years ago. God told him, through our great prophet, Moses, to let them go. He would not. So God sent his angels and they killed all the first-born of every family in Egypt ——"

"That sounds hard on them. I don't suppose it was their fault."

"The innocent suffered with the guilty, as they generally do. But lest any of our people should be killed they were told to kill a lamb and smear the blood on their door-posts. That was the beginning of our Feast of the Passover. You remember? It was just fifty days from today."

"And it was at the Passover Feast that they killed The Master," I said, dimly perceiving some connection in all these matters.

"Yes — it was at the Passover that they killed The Master. I have often thought of that. . . You see — the blood of the Passover Lamb saved our people in Egypt . . . and last Passover they killed The Master . . ." — but at that time none

of our minds were open enough to perceive all that that might mean.

"And Sinai and the Law ?" I asked.

"Well, Moses led the people out into the deserts between Egypt and here, and they came to Mount Sinai. And, just fifty days after they left Egypt, God gave them the Law which has governed us ever since. He gave it to Moses on Sinai to take down to the people."

"And when he came down," broke in John, "the people couldn't look at him, his face shone so. He had to wear a veil," — which was the part that had evidently struck him most.

"But why did his face shine so ?"

"Well, you see, he had been up in the Mount talking with God. It was all fire and smoke and thunderings ——"

We were sitting in their room, below the one The Master's followers made use of.

It was a clear, still day, and suddenly we were conscious of something unusual all about us — and not only about us but within us.

We all felt it. I could see by the strange puzzled look on their faces, as we stared wonderingly at one another, that John and his mother

were feeling just as I did. What it was I knew not, but I had a feeling of extraordinary exhilaration — a sense of vast expectation, as though something great and out of the common were happening. It made me feel almost light-headed — strangely uplifted both in mind and body.

It seemed to me too that the very air was full of sounds the like of which I had never before heard — a rustling and a rushing.

"Whatever is it ?" asked Mary anxiously, and we all went to the window to find out.

There was nothing there to account for it, but the people down below were standing staring up at our house. Then some began running towards the house, and we heard many feet hurrying up past the room where we were.

"Can they have set the place on fire up there ?" cried Mary, and we all three ran out and were carried up the stairs by the throng that was elbowing and jostling to get up.

"What is it ?" gasped John, with the breath almost squeezed out of him.

"Don't know. . ." "Going to see. . ." "Something queer going on up there," and over all the talk and heavy pantings we heard a strange

noise up above, growing louder as we got nearer.

At last we were thrust through the door with the rest, and found the upper room already crowded with the people we had heard running up before us.

The room was full of that strange sound and the feeling of something mysteriously vast and unusual, but multiplied now a hundredfold.

Everyone was gazing expectantly upwards. We could see nothing up there. I am not sure now what we heard. But, ever since, I have had a feeling of strange sounds up above us — like the sweep and rustle of mighty wings or the quiet, all-potent breathing of the spirits of the air.

But in the middle of the room, hedged close by the pressing crowd, and with no more than just room to move about, was the whole body of The Master's followers — Simon-Peter, and John and James, and Andrew, and Thomas, and Philip, and Nathaniel, all of whom I knew from having seen them on the shore of the Lake that morning, and five others whom I did not yet know.

They were acting very strangely, and, indeed, at first I hardly knew them. For their faces seemed all alight — alight from within — light

seemed to stream out from them, and their eyes were like living fires.

They raised their arms as though in prayer or thanksgiving. They uttered strange words. And always, all about them and about us, was that strange sound — if it was a sound — that strange sense of the unusual and the mysterious, which seemed to fill the room and the whole house, and set our heads whirling.

"They're all crazy," said a dark-skinned man against whom I was squeezed.

"They're drunk," said another, and truly I was not surprised at their so thinking, though I knew that it could not possibly be so. They seemed to me to be in a great state of exaltation — in a kind of frenzy or ecstasy, and, indeed, at first sight, hardly seemed to know what they were doing.

"Who are they? Where do they come from?" asked the dark man eagerly.

"Galileans — followers of the Nazarene who was crucified a while back," said one, and seemed proud of his knowledge.

"Galileans!" said the other. "Well, they may be drunk or they may be mad, but they're speaking my language — some of them, anyway."

"And what's that ?"

"I'm from overseas — Libya."

"That's odd," said one alongside him, "for they speak my tongue too, and I'm from Parthia."

And, from the eager straining faces I caught glimpses of all about the room, it seemed that many understood what was being said by Peter and the others.

And all the time, all about us was that mysterious something which seemed to fill our heads and make them swim.

The listeners began calling back to The Master's followers in their own tongues, and the hubbub was at its height when Peter, lifting up his arms in a gesture of entreaty, gathered his people closely about him and they all ceased speaking, and that strange sense of movement up above suddenly ceased also, and there fell a silence and a stillness that were almost as startling as that which had been before.

Then Peter, still full of the fervour of that which had come upon them, spoke in a voice like a trumpet, and with a weight of authority which was new to him and startling to us who knew him so well.

As he stood there, large and impressive, he looked to me a new man. I thought of him as I had seen him kneeling before The Master at the lake side, all rough and tangled, with the water running out of his hair and beard. And now — I could hardly believe this commanding Jove-like figure was really the simple fisherman of Galilee.

And his words — he spoke, boldly and fearlessly, in a triumphant ringing voice, as one having divine authority, and what he said was something like this, though at much greater length:

"Listen to me ! You men of Judæa and Jerusalem ! We are not drunk, as some of you seem to think. We are rejoicing in the fulfilment of the promise made by God through His prophet Joel, that in the last days He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, which promise was renewed to us by our Master, Jesus of Nazaret, whom you murdered and nailed to the cross.

"This Jesus, God raised up from the dead, as we, and many of you, can testify.

"This Jesus, sitting now at the right hand of God, receiving from Him the long-promised Holy Spirit, has this day poured it on us as you have seen and heard.

"Let all Israel now understand beyond any doubt that God has made him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified."

That bold and fearless utterance, straight from a heart boiling over with the fervour of so marvellous an experience, struck home to the hearts of all who heard it.

Peter, and all the others in equal measure, seemed like men who have received tidings of such overwhelming import that they must needs proclaim it aloud, and with all their might, to all who would hearken.

I know now that the eyes of their understandings were opened at last, and to the fullest, to the meaning and the wonder of the coming of the Christ — of his true nature, of his life, of his death, of his return. And that sudden enlightenment was almost too much for them. And no wonder ! For that was surely the mightiest happening the world had known since the day of its creation.

But they had found themselves suddenly filled also with new power — with the very mind and spirit of Christ himself. And they must tell it to all the world.

They had received their Divine Commission. They knew now what their Master required of them, and they lost not an instant in letting the world know it also.

But my own understanding of all this came much later. At that time I saw only the strange manifestation of what had happened to them, and its effect on myself and others.

There were many there who had heard The Master and had hoped great things of him. But whether they knew him or not, every man of them felt himself now in the presence of some new and mighty power.

The effect upon them — not upon all, but certainly on most of them — was remarkable. Some of them beat their breasts — as is their way in moments of excitement or contrition. They called out to Peter:

"What are we to do ? Tell us what to do !"

And Peter said boldly, "Repent ! — and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and God will send you His blessing. For His promise is for you and your children, and for those who are far off. Save

yourselves ! — Save yourselves from this crooked generation !"

"Yes ! Yes ! Yes ! We would be saved !" shouted the big dark man from Libya. "But there are many outside who would hear you also. Come down and tell them too !"

"We will go to them also," said Peter, and pushed through the crowd towards the door.

Those near the door passed the word to the crowd which filled the staircase, and in time we all got out into the open space in front of the house, where many more were waiting to hear what it all meant.

There Peter — his face all ablaze still with that which had come upon him, and his eyes shining with a great new light — spoke to them again with the same power and fervour as he had done upstairs, and the effect on them was the same.

Whole masses of them came crowding round him and the rest of The Master's followers, and begged to be baptized. John told me afterwards that over three thousand joined the brotherhood that day.

As I stood with Mary and John watching this most amazing scene, there ran out from the mob, and away past us, one whom they knew.

"It is Joda, the fruit porter," said Mary. "What can he be running away for ?"

"To fetch his friends," said John, and stood looking after him.

Not far from us, also watching the crowd, but aloofly, and with a look of disapproval on his face, stood another young fellow whom I knew slightly.

His name was Saul, and though his father and mother were Jews of good standing in Cilicia, he himself claimed to be a Roman citizen and enjoyed all a Roman's privileges.

He had a long face and pronounced but not unpleasing features — a firm mouth, a hooked Jewish nose, prominent dark eyebrows, and grey, rather short-sighted eyes, which gave him an intent, peering expression. But at the moment all these seemed agreed in violent distaste of what he saw. I feared, indeed, from the tense expression on his face, that he was going to have one of the peculiar seizures to which he was subject at times, and which, when he felt them coming on, made

him bitter and carping towards everybody about him.

"Who are they?" he asked brusquely, as he stopped again near us.

"The followers of The Teacher, Jesus of Nazaret," I told him.

"The one they crucified?"

"Yes."

"Galileans?"

"Yes."

"How come they to talk like that?"

"They have had power given them."

"They are all mad," he said disparagingly, and turned towards the house of Joseph Caiaphas.

But as he went, his path was crossed by a strange, pathetic little procession — Joda, the fruit porter, and a neighbour, carrying a girl on her bed under which they had slipped two poles, and behind them several women.

All their faces were ablaze with eagerness. They passed close to us and I saw that the girl on the bed had a sweet little face, though very thin and worn. But like the others' it was all alight with a new great hope, and her large dark eyes were like blazing lamps.

"Why — it is little Sara they are carrying," said Mary. "The poor little maid ! . . . Now why, I wonder ?"

But those who carried her knew what they, at all events, wanted.

They pushed in through the crowd, rudely, as it seemed to us, but evidently urged by an over-mastering purpose. And we followed to see what they were doing.

They got at last right through to where Peter was standing, and dropped the bed and the girl directly in front of him.

He stared down at her eager face in surprise, and then looked up at those who had brought her.

"What would you of me ?" he asked, perturbed and doubtful.

It was the girl who answered first.

"Sir," in a pitifully eager voice, "make me whole !"

"She has not set foot to earth for seven years," said her father, with a sob in his hoarse voice.

"But why do you think I can help her ?"

"The Great One has done such things for you today that He will do this other little one if you

ask Him. . . I would have taken her to The Teacher himself, as she kept asking me to; but I didn't dare. But, you see, you are a man like myself. And maybe you have a little maid of your own ——"

And Peter, looking down at the girl, asked her:

"Do you believe The Teacher would have done what you want ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why ?"

"I would have begged him and begged him till he did."

Then Peter took her hand and said gently:

"If it be God's will ——"

And she clung tightly to his hand and drew herself up by it, and stood on her feet. And she stood more firmly than Peter, for he was shaking all over.

But he stood looking upwards and said, in a voice still tremulous with surprise and thankfulness:

"Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for Thy mercy shown to this Thy daughter."

The girl and her father and mother and all the neighbours fell on their knees and would have

kissed the hem of his robe. But he said, very firmly now, "Give your thanks to God and to our Lord Jesus — the Christ, and follow him!" And they went rejoicing, the girl skipping like a young lamb, for the very joy of feeling her legs alive again.

Saul had seen it all, though from a distance. He watched the girl dancing home and stood for a while looking after them. Then his brows pinched again, and his lips tightened, and he went on towards the High Priest's house.

CHAPTER X

No-one seemed to want to go home. We all lingered there, drawn together in a new feeling of fellowship, and all lifted out of ourselves by these wonderful happenings. And there was in us also, I think, something of a feeling that while we were all together we were strong — strong enough even to face the High Priest's party — but that when we separated things might not be so well with us. For that Caiaphas and his followers would sit quiet under all this was not to be expected.

And as we stood there a strange thing befell.

A man whom I had noticed in the upper room hovered about us as though he wished to speak to us but was doubtful.

It was only when at last we turned to go into Mary's house that he ventured, and only as we entered the house that he spoke.

"You do not know me," he said in a low voice. "That is good. I will go in with you,"

and we went in, wondering who he was and what he wanted.

When we got into the living-room he stood facing us and said again, "You do not know me ?"

And John, regarding him intently, said at last, "Yes, I know you by your eyes. You are Jesus-bar-Abbas. But you are different."

"Yes, I am different. And I am no more Jesus-bar-Abbas. I am Jesus-ben-Jesus. You saved my life up there in Samaria. You sent me to the Lake and that saved my soul. I saw him there who died on the cross where I ought to have been. And I have become his man. . . I was born again there — of him — and so I am truly Jesus-ben-Jesus, and I serve him as a son."

"I am glad," said Mary warmly. "It was a small thing we did for you, Jesus-ben-Jesus — but one never knows."

"It was the greatest thing in my life," he began, with strong feeling, and then bethought himself — "except that other, when my Master died on the cross in place of me. . . I could not have stopped them killing him there, but all the time I thought of it I felt as if I was to blame. But he has forgiven me my share in it. For on the

hill near Kaphar-Nahum, when he spoke to us all that day — there were hundreds of people there, but he knew *me* and he looked at *me*. And the look in his eyes told me that he bore me no ill-will, and that I was forgiven, and that he wanted me for something. Now I would serve him. I want you to tell me how."

He was so evidently sincere, and so entirely a new man, that all our hearts, and especially Mary's went out to him.

"There is work for all," said Mary. "Have you any home ?"

"Neither home nor kinsfolk now. All went when Jesus-bar-Abbas died. . . The friends I had would not understand. Bar-Abbas is better dead."

"You shall stop here with us," said Mary. "There is room and to spare, and there will be work for us all."

"I shall be glad," he said simply.

Clean-shaven and decently clothed, calm of face and quiet in his manner, he had, indeed, put off the old and put on the new — been born again, as he said, and there was little fear of his being recognized, for the city was very full of strangers

still. But quiet as he was there was a restrained eagerness about him — inbred and formerly turned to ill uses, but now anxious only to be up and doing in the service of his new Master.

Mary fitted him up a small room where he could sleep, and told Simon-Peter all about him, and he found him plenty of work to do among the new believers — chiefly in ministering to their bodily needs.

We all came to like him. When you have saved a man's life and soul, and helped him on to his feet, and he does well, it is, I suppose, natural to have a warm feeling for him.

He had been a man of strong, even violent character; and, though he held himself rigorously in check, it was obviously not always easy for him to control his natural disposition.

He had always been his own man, and he found anything like discipline or ordered routine very irksome. Still, on the whole, he worked soberly and well. But against the High Priest's following he was always very bitter, and his new allegiance was of too young a growth for him to keep his feelings on that matter within bounds at times.

And he had one peculiarity, which yet we could understand and sympathize with, since we knew all the strange circumstances of his case. Whenever he could find time from his duties he disappeared, but we soon came to know where we could always find him. And that was on the Mound outside the Damascus Gate, where The Master died on the cross which should by rights have been his.

There he would sit — on the very piece of rock on which he had sat that other terrible day — there he would sit and think on it all. And if he had been roused to passion by things he had heard and seen in the city, there his soul found its peace again.

"It was there my new life began," he said simply, when we found out where he went, "though I did not know it at the time and thought only that I was a doomed man whom God hated. But when I sit there, I see him again on my cross, and he looks at me and shows me that he wants me. And that brings me peace again. . . I cannot even curse Annas and Caiaphas while I am up there, but when I pass through the Gate, coming back, and think of it all . . ."

He did his best, by throwing himself into his work for others, to keep his mind off Annas and Caiaphas. But whenever, in the doing of it, he came across evidence of their malevolence, and his thoughts got too much for him, he went up to the Mound and waited there till his better spirit prevailed again.

The city was in a very disturbed state. The religion of the New Way gained fresh adherents every day. The priests grew more and more perplexed and angry.

Caiaphas had hoped, by getting Jesus put to death, to block the new teaching at its source and make a quick end of it. But, instead, the fount of new life seemed to burst from that sealed tomb in a thousand different streams and to be flowing out to the ends of the world.

For very many of those who had embraced the new faith and been baptized had come to the capital only for the Feast. And now they were going back to their homes, in distant cities and far countries, full of this wide New Way, whose helpfulness and hopefulness appealed to their hearts and minds so much more than the old nar-

row, thorn-hedged path of the Law given to Moses on Sinai.

Even priests were leaving the old and joining the new, and we heard that Caiaphas was full of anger and bitter denunciation of The Master's followers; and we waited, not without apprehension, to see what he would do next.

But my anxieties were all for my friends. For myself I had, of course, no fears. Whatever the High Priest might do I was beyond his reach. But Mary and John, and Peter and the others, and all who had deserted the old for the new, were well aware that troubles might await them if Caiaphas logically pursued the line he had taken in the murder of their Master.

Nevertheless, these all continued as they had begun and let nothing discourage them. Peter and John-ben-Zebedæus and the other leaders met regularly in Mary's upper room for prayer and consultation. But to meet the ever-growing number of their followers, they used one of the cloisters of the Temple, and there taught them all they themselves knew of Jesus of Nazaret and his teaching.

Besides disturbing the priests, the new religion considerably upset the life of the city in other ways. Converts working for fanatical employers of the old faith were in many cases summarily dismissed. Others, working at their own trades, found themselves shunned by their best customers and their livelihoods diminished. For the most part, however, the common people regarded the new religion with sympathy. It was the upper classes and the priests' party who showed themselves intolerant and venomous.

And so great was the feeling of brotherliness among the converts that none were permitted to want. Those who had money gave of it freely, paying to the utmost of their means into a common fund which was administered for the good of all.

They were the more willing to do this because there was among them a sure belief that we were living in the end of an age, if not, indeed, in the last years of the world.

On the occasion of The Master's final appearance to them, when he had vanished from their sight, two angels in shining white robes had bidden them not to be disheartened, and assured

them that their Master would return to them in the same way he had gone. To them ! — so the time of waiting could not be long.

And so sure of this were their leaders that they taught that that time was close at hand, and that when it came their Lord and Master would appear in the clouds with the heavenly hosts, and that all his followers on earth would then be caught up into heaven, there to live with him for ever.

There was therefore no need for them to think overmuch of a future on the earth, or to make any provision for it. So those who had, gave, and those who had not were able to live until the good time should come.

Mary was especially prominent in this good work. For the twelve leaders still made her top room their headquarters, and she saw that they never lacked for food and drink and such comfort as she could give them. She and John and Rhoda were all kept busy seeing that none of their wants should go unsupplied.

They were full of gratitude to her, and covered her with confusion at times by their warm expression of it. But no words could tell all they

felt about it, for it was truly a very great help and comfort to them to know that that private place was always open to them, that food was always ready for them, and that there they could always meet for discussion and prayer without any fear of molestation.

They had no petty cares to distract them, but were free to devote their whole time and their whole hearts to their higher work.

We, of course, saw much of them. I was with John the greater part of each day, and the more I learned, and the more I saw of The Master's followers, the more they and their teaching wrought in my mind and heart.

John knew them all, of course, and I knew most of them through meeting them as they went up and down the staircase.

But I felt as if I knew best of all, and so liked them best, those with whom I had shared that great experience at the Lake, when The Master himself called us to breakfast; and I liked also Matthias, Mary's old friend, who very often stopped for a word or two with us on his way to or from their upper room.

CHAPTER XI

That wonderful cure of Joda's little Sara was only one of many similar good works wrought by these leaders. And no better exposition of their new powers could they possibly have had.

For she, who for seven years had never been out of the house unless carried in someone's arms, now went everywhere dancing and singing. It seemed as though she could not walk like other people — as though by her light dancing step she were trying to make up for all those lost years, and like a bird, she must sing because she was glad. She was, as she smilingly explained to Mary, when we met her skipping along like this one day, trying to see all the places she had always wanted to see. "For seeing things from your own feet is very different from seeing them from somebody else's arms."

She adored Peter and followed him whenever she could, though she found it very difficult to restrain her feet and her tongue when she

went into the Temple to listen to the teaching.

John and I saw her one afternoon tripping in front of us through the court of the women towards the cloister where the Twelve usually met their followers.

By the post of the portal called "The Beautiful," because of the richness of its decoration in Corinthian bronze, there lay, as always, a lame beggar.

Everybody knew Old Eleazar. Not, as I learned afterwards, that he was really old, nor even quite middle-aged. But he had been lying in that same spot, carried thither each morning by his people and away again at night, for so many years, that men and women, who had as children pestered their fathers and mothers for alms to give to him, were now in their turn pestered in the same way by their own children. And so he was to all of them Old Eleazar, and was looked upon as almost a part of the Temple.

Little Sara, we saw, stopped and spoke to him, seemed indeed to be speaking to him with unusual earnestness. She apparently asked him something, and his despondent shake of the head seemed to displease her.

She wagged her own pretty little head at him reprovingly, and was passing on, when she saw her friend Peter coming along with John-ben-Zebedæus. She said a further emphatic word to Eleazar and tripped on.

Peter had passed that lame man many times. This time — well, perhaps it was something unusual in the man's face as he glanced up at the two men — some more eager hope and craving than the mere wish for alms could put there.

Anyway, Peter stopped and stood looking down at him.

"Look at us !" he said, and their eyes met. And Peter said afterwards that he saw in Eleazar's a longing and a hope.

Then Peter, looking very earnestly upon him, said, "I have no silver or gold. But what I do have I will give you. . . In the name of Jesus the Nazarene — walk !" and he stopped and took him by the right hand and lifted him up.

Eleazar stood for a moment staring at him in uttermost bewilderment — stood on his own feet for the first time in all his life ! He swayed as if he would fall, but Peter held him tightly by the hand and gazed reassuringly into his face.

Then Eleazar felt in his feet and ankles something that he had never felt before. He could move. He could walk. He could leap.

Peter and John passed on. He ran after them, leaping and praising God. He caught hold of Peter again and clung to him as if he would never let him go. And all the people in the Temple came running, for Lame Eleazar was known to them all, and here he was walking and leaping and praising God.

And among them I saw again the dark, disapproving face of young Saul, and it seemed to me that this wonderful recovery of Eleazar pleased him no better than that of little Sara had done. From his face I was sure he was saying to himself, "They are all quite mad," and I was troubled that anyone should take objection to lame folk being made whole.

Peter missed no opportunity of advancing the cause to which his life was given. The cloister was packed with the people who had heard of this marvel and wanted to see Eleazar and the man who had healed him with a word.

And the way in which Peter always spoke now was a very great surprise to me. When I re-

membered that he was, after all, only a Galilean fisherman, with probably no great education — though, from the way he sometimes quoted passages from their prophets, he must have had some; and when I recalled his own confession of his terrible failure on that night when The Master was arrested and he denied all knowledge of him, I was filled with wonder at the boldness and power of his speaking.

Then I would remember also that morning at the Lake-side, and that wonderful experience in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. It was since then that this great change had come over Peter. I did not as yet comprehend what that had really meant to them all, but I could certainly see the effects.

And also, through much thinking about it since, it has seemed likely to me that, all along, the recollection of his denials of his Master, at the time of all times when he ought to have been at his side doing all he could to help him, had acted like a goad, ever spurring him on to greater and greater effort.

He had only one theme and that was The Master, Jesus of Nazaret — his life, his teaching

of the New Way, the atrocity of his murder at the hands of the priests, his reappearance amongst them as proof of the life after death, and of his mighty claim to be the veritable Son of their own great God, and his promised coming again at some very early time as Judge and Ruler of all men.

On this occasion, I remember, he said, "Why do you stare at us as if we had made this man walk by any power of our own? God raised Jesus from the dead, as we can all witness, and it is he who has made him hale and whole before you." And he boldly bade them repent and have their sins blotted out.

Young John Marcus has most of Peter's speeches almost in full. For he had been for a long time learning a new style of very rapid writing, and could put the words down as quickly as most men speak. Peter, he said, was rather difficult, for his power and energy were so great that his words came pouring out like a mountain torrent. But at times I have heard him speak very slowly and weightily.

But I am not going to put down here all that I heard spoken in those days, or there would be no room for anything else. If you should be so

interested in all this as to wish to read more of the teaching as given in these speeches, I will get John to transcribe some of them for you.

But before Peter had ended, there came, pushing rudely through the crowd, the officers in charge of the Temple and a number of priests and rulers and elders, and with them was young Saul again. And it seemed to me, from the look on his face, that it was probably he who had fetched them.

They demanded of Peter and John what they meant by raising such a commotion in the precincts of the Temple. And then, without waiting for an answer, they laid rough hands on them and hauled them away.

It was getting towards evening, and their law, as John explained to me, permits of a trial only in the day. So the officers lodged them in the neighbouring prison for the night, and we went home in great distress of mind on their account.

"It's those Sadducees, you see," said John, as we went. "They hate the idea of any after life or of any return from the dead. And so The Master's return and Peter's teaching of it is poison to them."

"But what can they do to them ? What harm have they done ? Surely it's not a crime, even against your law, to make a lame man walk."

"I don't know what they can do, but I'm quite certain they'll do everything they can to stop them speaking like that to the people."

Then something else occurred to me.

"Look here, John ! You say you can only hold a trial during the day. But surely they tried The Master during the night."

"Yes, there has been much hot talk about that, and there's no doubt that the High Priest broke the law. But they were all so mad against him that they cared for nothing but to get him condemned by Pilate. . . Unfortunately, when the High Priest breaks the law it is quite different from anyone else doing it."

Mary was greatly disturbed by our news, and when the others came in they and many of their new followers went up to their room, and there they spent the whole night in prayer for the deliverance of Peter and John.

We, and a great crowd of others, were at the hall where the Sanhedrin held its meetings, very early next morning.

John, who had lived all his life about there, knew everybody and the ways in and out of everywhere. He worked us both inside and we heard and saw all that passed.

Old Annas, Joseph Caiaphas, Johanan, Gamaliel-ha-Zaken, Alexander, and many others he was pointing out to me, when Peter and John were brought in and stood up before them, and Eleazar with them.

Joseph Caiaphas, in his insolent and overbearing way, demanded of them, "By what power or in whose name have fellows like you done this ?"

But if he thought he could brow-beat Peter and John he was very much mistaken. They faced him with as high a look as his own; nay, it seemed to me with even a higher look, as though they were very conscious of, and rejoicing in, the immensity of the power that was behind them.

Peter looked the High Priest straight in the face, and it made my heart leap to see and hear him. He spoke simply and boldly as he always did, and right from his heart, heedless of the consequences.

"Rulers and elders," he said, "if we are being

cross-examined today upon a benefit rendered to a cripple — as to how this man got better — you and all the people of Israel must understand that he stands before you, strong and well, thanks to the name of Jesus — Christ — the — Nazarene; that — Jesus — whom — you — crucified — and — whom — God — raised — from — the — dead." He said those words very slowly and meaningly, and to me each word seemed like a weighty blow in the face, ay and a shrewd thrust at the hearts and minds of his judges.

And he went on, "He is the stone, despised by you builders, which has become head of the corner. There is no salvation by anyone else, nor is there any second Name under Heaven appointed for us men and our salvation."

That bold utterance struck so into my heart that I got John to write it out for me from his notes. For it seemed to me to put the whole basis of the teaching of the New Way like a unit into its shell.

Those haughty elders and rulers had probably, I thought, never in their lives been spoken to like that before. They were accustomed to ride roughshod over the people and have things all

their own way. This New Way, and the power of the Spirit that was in it, must have seemed very ominous to them. Truly there would not be room in life for it and for them.

They were dumb with astonishment. They knew these men to be uncultured, and persons of no consequence. And yet they spoke and looked as if all power in earth and heaven was theirs.

And as to any feeling of fear, Peter looked to me like a lion of the desert at bay, and John-ben-Zebedæus, who was personally known to some of them, stood fair and strong beside him, and regarded them as boldly and fearlessly.

They remembered that these common fellows were followers of the Nazarene, that Jesus whom Peter had just held up to them as The Highest in earth or heaven; and perhaps some tremors shook their hearts as they remembered the evil they had done to him.

They were evidently nonplussed as to what to do. They ordered Peter and John to be taken out of the room, and fell to anxious consultation among themselves.

Their difficulty was that this amazing thing had been done in sight of all the people. Eleazar,

lame from his birth, was known to everyone, and there he stood before them, sound and well. An obvious miracle, and when asked by what means it was done, these brazen fellows had the effrontery to declare that it was none of their doing but wholly the work of their leader, Jesus the Nazarene, with whose murder they flatly reproached them. If this kind of thing was allowed to go on there would be an end of the Law, and of themselves as the head of it. For the people were flocking to this New Teaching in thousands.

Some of them were for extreme measures. "Send the men, and all who teach their doctrine, after their leader," said they.

But, in the minds of the more thoughtful and less hot-headed, there had arisen doubts.

What if this new doctrine should be of God, and these men His chosen instruments? It might be. Better to go slowly and wait developments. And these at last prevailed.

Peter and John were brought in again, and Caiaphas, in his harsh, grating voice, said to them:

"You are forbidden to speak one single word

about this name of Jesus. If you do so it is at your own peril. Now go !"

But Peter and John faced them as boldly as before.

"You must decide for yourselves," said Peter, "whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God. We certainly cannot give up speaking of what we have seen and heard — and we will not."

"If you come before us again on this charge," said Caiaphas heatedly, "it will mean prison and flogging for you," and with an angry wave of the hand he dismissed them.

We followed them home, and when those in the upper room, still praying for their deliverance, saw them come in safe and sound, they sent up a mighty shout of thanksgiving, and prayed earnestly again that they might all be kept fearless and true to the name and service of their Lord and Master.

And as they prayed, we heard again that strange sound as on the day of Pentecost — the sound of something mighty and mysterious, which seemed to fill the whole place and shook us where we stood.

CHAPTER XII

The followers of the New Way numbered now close on five thousand, and the care of them had become no small task. For both their bodies and their souls had to be looked after, and in all that Jesus-ben-Jesus was very helpful.

Curiously — but, as I have since thought, very characteristically — among the first and neediest claimants for help were Eleazar, the lame man, healed by God's grace at the Beautiful Gate, and his family. The effect on Eleazar himself had been wholly good, bodily, mentally, and spiritually. He showed his gratitude in many ways. He was a visible token of the good will of God, and he never forgot it, nor let others forget it. He followed Peter like a shadow, and never tired of helping where he could.

But the effect of his recovery on his family was quite unexpected and led to no little unpleasantness. For Eleazer helpless and a cripple had been the mainstay of quite a wide circle of kins-

folk. They had lived well on his alms-takings. Now, their income had dried up and they clamoured ceaselessly against Peter and Eleazar, and demanded satisfaction of their impossible claims. It was not till Stephanos took hold of the matter that they were at last silenced.

Money came in freely, for the wealthier ones, who were, however, much the smaller number, not only gave gladly, but many of them even sold some of their possessions and brought the money to the Twelve to dispense to the poorer ones.

I was with Mary and John in their house one morning, when Peter, passing down on his way to the Temple, saw us and came into the room. He very often did that, to show his gratitude to Mary for all her kindness to them all.

As we were talking, Joda, the fruit-porter, brought in some melons and grapes Mary had ordered.

At sight of Peter, and at thought of little Sara and the change he had wrought in her, Joda always wanted to fall on his knees and kiss the hem of Peter's robe, and Peter always stopped him with a quiet, "To God the thanks, Joda !"

And after greetings that morning, Joda broke out with some news he was full of. "Ananias-ben-Jannai has sold his vineyard out Bethany way, and my cousin Esli-ben-Menna has bought it. He's grumbling at the price Ananias made him pay — it's over a thousand shekels — but it's all the better for you" — and he looked at Peter — "for I believe Ananias is going to give the price to the fund."

"We shall be grateful," said Peter. "The number needing help is growing every day."

It was, I think, the day after this that John and I went up to the Temple to listen to the teaching and found Peter already there, and the people were bringing their offerings to the fund and laying them on a cloth at his feet.

And while we stood watching, a very strange and awful thing happened.

As each one made his offering, Peter thanked them quietly in the name of God.

Then, when all the rest had finished, a man came forward carrying a weighty bag of money in his hands. I did not know him, but I could not help thinking — though I remembered afterwards that I did try to check the thought as uncharitable, and

unworthy of that which was working so strongly in me — well, it seemed to me as though he had waited till the end so that his gift might be the more noticed.

His manner seemed to desire our applause for his generosity, and truly it was an unusually large gift.

As he dropped the bag at Peter's feet with a heavy money chink, he said:

"We have sold our vineyard and here is the money for the fund — eight hundred silver shekels," — and stood expectant of Peter's thanks.

But Peter, grave and stern, very different from the way in which he had accepted all the other gifts, looked straightly at him and said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart and made you cheat the Holy Spirit by appropriating some of the money paid for the land ? When it was unsold, was it not your own ? And after the sale, was not the money yours to do as you pleased with ? How could you think of doing a thing like this ? It is not us men you have defrauded, but God."

We were standing near Peter. We saw Ananias's eyes grow large with fear, as though he beheld some awful thing. Then he fell at Peter's

feet like a stricken ox, and when they went to pick him up he was dead. And fear and trembling fell upon us all, for this was surely the act of God and we had seen it with our own eyes. When they found that he was indeed dead, some of the younger men folded his clothing about him and carried him out at once for burial. And Peter, under the stress of that dreadful happening, spoke to the rest of us, like a wise and loving father, of that greatest love of all which was God, and how He had manifested it by sending His Son Jesus to draw His people back to Him, and how the greatest of all sin was sin against that great love of God.

And all the time, outside the solid crowd of hearers hanging on to his words, the Temple officers hovered about, like wolves round a flock of sheep on the plains. And I was sure they were listening and seeking for any of his words which they might be able to twist to his discredit. But Peter paid no heed to them and went on speaking as he felt he had to do.

Not very long afterwards there came a stir in the crowd, and a woman made her way through it to the front row and stood looking about her as though seeking someone.

"It is Ananias's wife, Sapphira. Has she not heard ?" said one near me to his neighbour, in an awed whisper.

And Peter, seeing her, stopped speaking and stood looking at her, and a great silence fell upon us all. Sapphira still stood looking about for her husband.

Then Peter asked her, very gravely, "Tell me, — did you only sell the land for eight hundred shekels ? — and we who knew held our breath for her answer.

"Yes," she said boldly, but yet with a startled look, "that was all we sold it for."

And Peter, looking sadly on her, said, "How could you arrange to put the Lord's Spirit to the proof ? . . . Listen !" He held up his hands . . . and in the dreadful silence that befell, we heard the sound of approaching footsteps in the Cloister outside. . . Nearer. . . Nearer. . . "These are the footsteps of those who have been burying your husband. They are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."

She stared wildly at him; then the light went out of her eyes, and she fell and died just as her husband had done. And the young men, coming

in and finding her dead, carried her out to bury her with her husband.

Peter lifted his hands in benediction above the heads of the awe-stricken crowd. He said simply, "May God give us of His Holy Spirit and make us all true to Him !" Then he went home with us, feeling, as we all were, sorely shaken by what had happened.

Instead of going straight to their upper room, he came with us into the one where Mary was busy with Rhoda preparing supper, and he sat there for a while, speaking of this very strange happening.

Mary was greatly upset by it all — by the dreadful fate of Ananias and his wife, and by the ill-effect she feared it might have on those who had so recently joined the Fellowship of the New Way, or might be thinking of joining.

But Peter said weightily, "If any are fearful and fall away, we are better without them. . . So many have joined of late that it is not possible for us to know them all yet — nor what their real motives may be — nor if the good ground of their hearts is deep enough and prepared enough for the seed to root and flourish there."

And he said about Ananias that, quite apart from what he had heard from Joda, he had all along been very doubtful about him. What could have been his motive in doing as he had done, he could not make out, whether it was vanity, a desire to shine before his fellows by the magnitude of his offering, or a wish to make sure of a share in the common fund — or what.

"Who shall understand all the workings of another's heart — save God ?" he said. "But sometimes the face and the eyes tell their own messages, and I should have known that Ananias was playing false even if I had not heard Joda's story."

I know that there was a very widespread feeling that in this new religion of the Way there was something altogether beyond human understanding — almost too great for ordinary people to have anything to do with.

The teaching appealed to many, but the wonders they had seen accomplished by its leaders in the name of their Master made them fearful of venturing into the great unknown. The life and conduct of those who had joined proved, in most cases, their possession of a new and higher foundation and hope. Their assurance of a still greater

life to come filled them with a visible joy and security which many envied them, but which to the rulers, who were mostly Sadducees, was poisonous blasphemy.

Varus and Longinus were never tired of discussing all these matters with me, and, knowing that I was seeing much of young John and his mother, and at times Peter and others of the brotherhood, their questions were endless.

They had both come to a devout belief that Jesus the Nazarene was truly the Son of God. Their ideas of God were as vague as most people's, but they accepted Him as the one supreme Deity. They believed absolutely in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and so of all who believed in him. Of the rest they were doubtful. They tried in their lives to live more as Jesus would wish them to do, as far as they understood the teaching about him.

But they would not openly join the believers in the New Way, because they feared the results to their positions.

Rumours reached us continually that the High Priests and their party were full of fury at the way things were going. At least five thousand of

those who used to be entirely subservient to them, and looked up to them as their spiritual leaders, had broken away and become staunch adherents of the new religion. They breathed out threatenings and slaughter and laid their plans for making an end of the whole matter. So far, the more they had stamped upon it the more it had grown.

Peter and the others were well aware of the menace, but they went calmly and steadily on with their work and wasted no time in useless fears about what might come of it.

John and I were still young enough to feel greatly uplifted at being permitted to number ourselves among the personal friends of the great leaders of the new faith. We went up regularly to their meetings in one or other of the Temple cloisters; and one of our daily joys was to walk behind them as they went up there, and to feel that in a way we had a share in them and their wonderful works. And more than once, Peter, catching sight of us, would fall behind the others and converse with us as we went. Then indeed our joy was full.

For word of the healing of Joda's little Sara and Eleazar had spread far and wide, and from all the

country round Jerusalem the folk had begun to bring in their sick and lay them down along the streets Peter and the others would pass through, and they were healed in the most marvellous fashion.

We, walking with Peter, or close behind him, would see their straining faces full of anxious hope as we came along, and the joy that filled them and their friends as they felt the healing grace descend on them and new life flow into them. It was all very wonderful, and no-one could experience it without feeling more and more that some new and un-understandable power was at work in the world.

The High Priests felt it too, but whereas among the common people it worked only good, among those who opposed it, it made only for evil and but strengthened their determination to put a stop to it.

Peter and John-ben-Zebedæus and the others, through whom this amazing new gift of healing was manifested, rejoiced in it greatly as the seal of God's approval on their ministry and as a token of His good will to men, especially the suffering ones. And boldly and joyfully they proclaimed their

Master as the Great Healer of bodies and souls, and sought by these and every means to win men to him.

The Master himself had done still mightier things, and often, to their amazement, had seemed anxious to hide them; perhaps — as Peter once said to young John — lest they should seek him only for the healing of their bodies whereas it was their souls he cared for most.

But to these his followers their new power was mightily upbuilding. In that great crisis, when their leader had died the death of a malefactor, and they lay broken and scattered amid the ruins of their hopes, they had proved themselves cowards. They had fled like sheep and left him alone. This mighty gift of the Spirit, of which the healing power was but one manifestation, had assured them of his forgiveness and understanding and had given them the courage of lions.

One afternoon, while the teaching in the Temple was going on as usual, the officers of the High Priest came pushing through the listening crowd, and laid hands on Peter and John and the rest, and hurried them off to the public ward, where delinquents were kept in custody till they were judged.

We feared the worst for them, for the Rulers in the Sanhedrin had told them plainly what would happen to them if they persisted in their teaching and refused to obey orders.

We hurried home to tell John's mother, and we were all so anxious and depressed that none of us slept at all that night. In the upper room, there gathered as many of the most earnest in the new faith as it would hold, and they spent the night there in fervent prayer for the deliverance of their leaders.

CHAPTER XIII

Very early in the morning, in fact as soon as it was dawn, we all gathered in front of the Hall of the Sanhedrin to give Peter and the rest a word of cheer as they were taken in, and then to wait for what might happen.

And what did happen was very amazing. We saw the officers go off to fetch the prisoners, and we saw them come hurriedly back without them. And we crept in at their heels to hear what was the matter.

The chief official strode in, looking very much puzzled and upset.

"The men are not in the prison," he said. "The doors were locked and the guards were on duty outside, and they swear that nothing had passed them. But the men are not there."

And while they were still confounded at this, a man came hastening in, and I saw it was young Saul, in a state of great excitement, and he cried out with, as it seemed to me, something of shrill

reproach in his voice, as though the fault was theirs, "The men you put in prison are standing in the Temple, teaching the people just as usual."

At which we all set off at once for the Temple, but the chief officer and his men got there before us, and presently we met them bringing back Peter and the others.

But they treated them quietly, almost with deference, for this whole matter was beyond them and they no doubt began to have qualms about it — as, we heard afterwards, not a few members of the Sanhedrin itself were beginning to have. And also, the crowd, which had just been listening eagerly to the teaching of the New Way in the Temple, looked quite ready to take up stones and hurl them at the officers for their interference.

So they brought the prisoners into the Great Hall, and Caiaphas burst out angrily:

"We strictly forbade you to teach about this Name, did we not? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. You want to make us responsible for this man's death."

Peter looked quietly back at him, and the difference between these two — the leaders of their different faiths — struck many of us, for a great

crowd had swarmed into the Hall at the heels of the guard. Caiaphas was like a foaming wave of passion. Peter stood like a rock and the wave broke on it in vain.

He answered quietly, "One must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised from the dead Jesus — whom — you — murdered — by — hanging — on — a — gibbet. . . God lifted him up to His right hand as our pioneer and saviour, in order to grant repentance and remission of sins to Israel. To these facts we bear witness, with the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him."

This bold reassertion of their position and intentions set Caiaphas and most of the rulers aflame with anger. They were faced with a matter altogether beyond them. They felt themselves powerless, and so were the more furious.

They gathered in a group for consultation and it was evidently very heated. We heard Caiaphas's harsh voice saying angrily, "The cross . . . the cross !" But they were divided, and presently they were all listening to the words of one who seemed to be counselling prudence. John whispered to me that it was the great Rabbi Gamaliel-

ha-Zaken, and that he was a notably wise man.

What he urged upon them was this — it got spread abroad afterwards — "Go cautiously in this matter ! Leave these men to themselves. If this enterprise of theirs springs from men it will collapse, as we have seen many others do. But if it be from God you will be unable to put them down, and you may even find yourselves fighting against God."

Finding the majority against him Caiaphas gave way; but with a very ill grace. He ordered the Brethren to be publicly flogged, told them angrily again to stop speaking of Jesus and the New Way, and then set them free.

And Peter and the others gave thanks before us all that they had been deemed fit to suffer for the sake of The Name, and then they went straight back to the Temple cloister and resumed their teaching — a brave, bold thing to do, and it kindled all our hearts and made us brave too. But they were so filled with that new power that had been given them that the threats of the High Priest counted as nothing with them.

Later, in the upper room, Peter told us how, in the middle of the night, someone — an angel, he

said — stood by them, and took them out of the prison, in spite of its locked doors and the guard outside, and bade them go and stand in the Temple and tell the people about this Life. The moment the Temple gates were opened, at the first sign of dawn, they had gone in and begun speaking to those who saw them and flocked in after them.

Can you wonder that happenings such as these — quite unexplainable unless you accept them as direct acts of God — made an impression on us who saw and heard them, which nothing could ever wipe out? Nay more — made us sure in our own hearts, beyond the possibility of doubt, that some more than human beneficent power was at work amongst us for our good, and for the good of all who would acknowledge and accept it?

So the good news of the Name spread mightily and in it many great things were done. But Mary's face grew ever more anxious and care-lined. For, she said, "Joseph Caiaphas is a hard man to fight. I have known him from a boy, and if he takes an ill-will at anyone he never rests till he satisfies it. And this matter hits him hard in many ways. He has killed The Master. He will make an end of his followers also."

She urged Peter and the others to leave the city, for a time at all events. The country folk needed the Word quite as much, and there was plenty of work to be done outside.

But Peter was immovable. "Later on we must go further afield, if we are let live," he said. "But at present our work is here. Where the sheep are, there the shepherds must be, especially when the wolves are after them."

And, indeed, there was more than enough work for them all, with close upon five thousand believers in The Name, and more coming in every day. They had to be taught, and many of them had to be fed. And in time this latter part of the work became more than the Twelve could properly attend to, if the teaching was to be carried on as well.

Peter had been feeling this for some time past, and when rumours reached him that some of the Greek-Jews were not satisfied with the treatment they and their families were receiving, he dealt with the matter at once.

After consultation with the others they called the people together, explained how the rapid growth of the new teaching made it impossible for them to

attend to both the bodily and spiritual necessities of their increasing numbers, and asked them to choose from among themselves seven men in whom they could trust, who would devote themselves to the administration of the common fund.

Among those chosen was our friend Stephanos, and no better choice could have been made, for he was loved and trusted by all.

We saw more of him now, but still not as much as we would have liked. For he came back to his little room in Mary's house, and now and again snatched a hasty meal with them and sometimes I was there.

But the amount of work that devolved upon him left him little time for eating or talking with us; and when he came in at night, John said he was so tired out that he went straight to his room to get some sleep, but never as much as he ought to have had, and Mary was greatly concerned for him.

He was busy, you see, providing other people with all that they needed for their bodies and at the same time in building up their faith and strengthening it, and no-one could do those things better than he.

Many of the newcomers, though they had cast

their lot for the New Way, had still much to learn about it, if they were to become sound and trustworthy followers of The Master; and Stephanos's winning ways and clever brain and tongue were just what were needed to confirm and strengthen them.

He went from house to house seeing that none lacked the means of living, and every house into which he entered was the happier for his coming.

He talked with the people, and told them of his own personal experiences with The Master, when they were such close friends and went about the country together. He prayed with them and helped them in every way that his great warm heart and loving mind could suggest. And the city was full of stories of his good and wonderful doings — of sick folk healed, and lame folk cured, and blind folk restored.

No doubt the others did equally good work, but being such friends with Stephanos we saw more of his doings than of anyone else's. For he very often asked John and me to help him on his rounds, and it was always a joy to us to go with him, to carry his baskets of food, and his bag of money. It was usually money he distributed from the com-

mon fund, but he liked to have with him also some further provision to add a little to the fare of the old and the sick and the helpless ones.

I shall never forget the glad and grateful faces that welcomed him everywhere, for we felt that we shared in it all.

He talked with them all so lovingly and understandingly, like a big elder brother — clearing away their difficulties, confirming and strengthening them in the New Way, making The Master alive to their hearts and minds.

We saw him do marvels of healing in The Master's name. We saw him everywhere break bread with them, while he told them how Jesus did that, the night before he was killed, and how he asked them all to think of him always in the breaking of bread, so that he would be continually in their hearts.

It was good to see their faces lighten as soon as they saw him, and better still to see their faces as we passed on, leaving them filled afresh with hope and strength.

So many newcomers were joining the fellowship, and so many — especially the priests — needed help, that he could rarely repeat

his visits except in a few very special cases.

And, indeed, he never got quite round all the fellowship. That was not permitted him.

The other six, who were chosen at the same time as himself, carried on his work, but none of them were everywhere received with such joy as Stephanos had been.

And in all his work Jesus-ben-Jesus was as his right hand. John and I could only be with Stephanos at times. Ben-Jesus was always with him. For as soon as he met Stephanos, Ben-Jesus conceived an immense admiration and love for him, and it never slackened or wavered.

He averred that he was the most like The Master of any of them; and there was nothing he would not do for him.

Why ? — Ben-Jesus could, perhaps, hardly have explained that himself. Maybe he found in Stephanos the likeness of what he would have liked to be himself. Anyway, he made him his hero, could never do enough for him, and was never happier than when serving him.

We rejoiced greatly with Stephanos in his work, but feared lest he should kill himself with too much of it, for he never spared himself one whit.

Now, as you can well imagine, all that was going on, and the vast increase in the followers of the New Way, made the High Priest and his party more and more furious about the whole matter. And especially, the number of priests who had come out and renounced the old faith and joined the new was gall and bitterness to Annas and Caiaphas and their people.

They had endless discussions as to what to do to stop the spread of this, to them, pestiferous heresy. And we saw young Saul constantly going and coming to and from Caiaphas's house.

"There will be trouble before long," said Mary forebodingly. "Each time I see Joseph Caiaphas his face grows grimmer and bitterer. He is hard hit and he's not one to suffer defeat quietly. You see, there are many, outside us, who are openly saying that what he did to The Master was not according to the Law, and there will come a judgement on us all because of it. . . As for young Saul, I'll wish him no ill, but I can't help thinking it would be no bad thing for us all if he died in one of his seizures. He is Caiaphas's right hand in all this."

And it was not long before we saw that she was right.

CHAPTER XIV

Peter and John and the rest of The Twelve went in daily expectation of being arrested and thrown into prison again. But they slackened not at all in their work because of that. They went boldly to the Temple cloister every day and the people flocked to their teaching.

But Caiaphas left them alone. It looked as though he deemed it useless to put them in prison, for no prison seemed capable of holding them. Twice he had tried it, and the last time they had walked out as though such things as chains and bolts and guards were not.

So, as the roots and trunks of the tree were too strong for him, he began to lop the branches. He left the leaders alone and began to strike at their followers. And in all his venomous doings young Saul was his zealous and untiring helper.

The Jews in Jerusalem were divided into many parties, according to the distant lands from which many of them had come; and each party had its

own synagogue and its own ideas as to the meaning and practice of the old Mosaic laws. And at times they got into violent dispute concerning them.

The New Way, proclaimed by The Master in his life and teaching, and taught since his death by his followers, gave to the world the true spirit of the Law as he, by the light of that which was in him, perceived it, and took little account of the hard dry letter of it. And this ran so contrary to the teaching of many of these sects that, in their anger, they used to come to the meetings in the Temple cloister and attempt to disturb them by their arguments and objections.

Peter and John and the rest were excellent preachers and teachers of their Master's Way. Their large hearts were wholly given to it, but they had not had the training necessary to meet and refute the subtle reasoning of these Jews from Rome and Alexandria and Cilicia, whose wits had been sharpened by constant controversy with the polished pagans among whom they had been brought up.

Our friend Stephanos, however, had been reared in that same atmosphere, and his well-ordered brain and skill in controversy pointed him out as

the best man to fight the intellectual battle with the opponents of The Way.

Day after day he met them, and upheld against them the simplicity and beauty of the teaching of Jesus — the New Way — as compared with the hard and narrow lines of the old. In these controversies he always came out triumphant. In spite of all their cleverness, he carried conviction to the hearts even of the wranglers, and that made them still more furious. The more their hearts told them they were wrong, the more the blood boiled in their heads against him and all that he represented.

These disputations were attended by crowds of priests to whom the matter made great appeal. And as a result still more of them threw off their allegiance to the old way and embraced The New, and the face of Caiaphas grew blacker and bitterer each time we saw him.

Stephanos used to come back to Mary's house physically worn out with the strife, for they were many and he was one. But his courage and high spirit never failed him, and his face was always calm and steadfast. Their perversity hurt him. To such a lofty soul it was pitiful that men should

perceive the right even against their wills, and yet deliberately stick to the wrong. It wounded him as it had wounded his Master.

Mary was grievously concerned for him, as indeed we all were.

"They will compass your death as they did The Master's," she said, in great distress, not once but many times, and went about her duties with a face full of apprehension.

And Stephanos would quietly answer:

"That may very likely come, Mary. And if it does I shall go right joyously to join him. I could desire no happier end."

"Joseph Caiaphas has curdled his soul with bitterness against it all. He's a bad one to counter, he has no scruples and too much power."

"We must try to believe he thinks he's in the right. . . But truly, it is not easy to think it. . . Sometime, perhaps, he will see and understand."

"Not as long as he's alive," said Mary stubbornly. "I know him. I've known him since he was a boy, and he was always venomous when he was crossed."

"God knows him still better," said Stephanos quietly.

The end came very suddenly.

John and I had gone with Stephanos to the Temple one afternoon to listen to the discussion, as we had done many times before. For it was a lesson in skilful reasoning to hear him expose the weakness of their claims, and a joy to hear him boldly and bravely drive home the wider and loftier teaching of The Master.

Jesus-ben-Jesus rarely went to these discussions in the Temple. He had a vast admiration for Stephanos's powers of argument, but he said he needed no convincing as to The Way. He had learned by his own bitter and wonderful experience more than all the words in the world could teach him. So he went on with his work among the people while Stephanos wrestled with the disputatious ones in the Temple.

The sharp and general line of division between Stephanos and the others was — that they held stubbornly that men could only worship God in the Temple and could only approach Him through the priests. Whereas Stephanos, for the New Faith, asserted positively that God could be found and worshipped anywhere and everywhere, and

was longing always to welcome every man who sought Him, no matter how or where.

He had got thus far on that fateful afternoon, and John and I were as usual feeling exultant at the discomfiture of the others, when, of a sudden — and as I have since felt convinced, by agreement beforehand — a great mob of them came charging through the crowd and flung themselves upon him.

And as they came, and before John and I were knocked over and trampled under their feet, I caught sight of Saul's bitter dark face under the pillars whence they had come. The others were jerking curses and foaming at the mouth, as only angry Jews can foam and curse. But Saul's face was hard and intent, and he neither foamed nor cursed. He just stood there like one who, having launched a bolt, stands watching the result.

Before we had got on to our feet again the cloister was empty. We heard outside the tumult of their going, and sped after them to the Hall of the Sanhedrin whither they had dragged Stephanos. And as we went, John panted in broken sobs, "They will murder him, as they did Jesus."

The Hall was crowded, but we wormed our way in till we could see all that went on.

Caiaphas and the rest of the Council were sitting there. It looked to me as though they had been expecting what had happened. And, glancing quickly and anxiously along the row of hostile faces, John muttered in my ear, "Old Gamaliel and his lot are not there. These are all against us — every one of them."

Gamaliel, you will remember, was the wise old Rabbi who had advised them to go cautiously at Peter's trial. Those who had dragged Stephanos in were shouting their accusations against him.

He had said blasphemous words against Moses and against God. He had said that the Temple-worship was not necessary. He had taught the people that this Jesus, whom he called Lord and Master, would destroy the Temple and alter all the Law and their old customs. They had, with their own ears, heard him say these things and more.

We watched anxiously. Joseph Caiaphas stood up and at last got them quieted. He was a tall commanding figure. His beetling black brows were pinched in a malignant scowl as he looked

down on Stephanos, and said harshly, "Are these things so?" — and all the rest of the Council leaned forward in their seats to hear what answer Stephanos could make to accusations so direct and overwhelming.

And once again I was struck by the contrast between judge and prisoner; Caiaphas, black with the ill-will he hardly tried to restrain, a judge whose judgement was already delivered in his face and voice; Stephanos, tall and slim, of a fair and open countenance, and perfectly calm and unperturbed in spite of the hustling he had undergone.

There was not a trace of fear in him, though he must have known how this matter might end. For his accusers were like hungry wolves, and his judges were obviously leagued against him.

But his face and eyes shone with the light that was in him. And as he stood before them, many of them must have thought of that Other, who had faced them in just that same calm and lofty spirit, and had been ruthlessly and lawlessly done to death by them.

Very quietly, but in a voice that struck right into one's heart, he said, "Listen, brothers and fathers!" — and then, in a wonderful speech, he

traced the history of their race right down from the days of Abraham, their great progenitor, showing them how, in spite of the favour God had shown them, they were always rebelling against Him and killing the messengers He sent to help them.

He made it clear that God was not their God only but the God of all men, Gentiles quite as much as Jews, and that His worship was not restricted to their Temple or any other special place, but that He could be found anywhere by all who sought Him.

And he ended with a terrific denunciation. "You stiff-necked ones !" he cried, shaking a menacing hand which included them all in its sweep — "uncircumcised in heart and ear, you are always resisting the Holy Spirit ! As with your fathers, so with you ! Which of the prophets did your fathers fail to persecute ? They even killed those who came to announce the coming of the Just One. And here you have betrayed him — murdered him ! — you who got the Law that angels transmitted and have not obeyed it !"

John and I looked at one another. It was magnificent. But it made us quake with fear as to

what would befall the man who spoke so bravely and fearlessly.

The Council gnashed and foamed upon him. And through their hirelings below there ran a hoarse growl as of wild beasts.

But Stephanos was paying no attention to the effect of his words. His tall figure seemed to grow taller. He stood gazing straight up, past the roof, past the sky, past all mortal things, and his right hand pointed straight up at what he saw.

"Look !" he said. "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand !" — and his face was transfigured with the shining of the light within him and without.

At that, with a roar, the crowd rushed upon him. They struck at him with their fists. They spat at him. Then they rose like a wave and hurled themselves at him and bore him away.

We followed, breathless and fearful. They whirled down the narrow streets, yelling and cursing, dragging Stephanos with them.

They poured roaring through the Damascus Gate towards the Mound where The Master had been crucified.

A little way up it was a cutting out of which

the rock had been at one time quarried. They dragged him up to the top of this, bound his hands, and flung him headlong down into the hollow and rolled on to him a great piece of rock from the top.

Then they leaped down after him, flung off their outer garments, and began stoning him viciously with the small rocks with which the place was strewn.

We stood watching as well as we could through our tears, and we were both sobbing and panting and gasping till we wellnigh choked. It was terrible and horrible, but we could do nothing amid that mob of howling madmen.

We saw Stephanos struggle bravely to his knees after the first rock crashed down on him. His face was uninjured, the rock had struck him in the back and rolled over him.

He looked straight up into the sky, and his face shone again as he cried in a clear high voice, "O Lord Jesus, receive my spirit !"

Then as the stones began to batter him down, he spoke once more, "Lord, let not this sin stand against them !"

And then, as the stones hailed heavier and

heavier upon him, he sank down and lay still.

His murderers had flung their garments at the feet of a man who had stood watching and approving it all. And now, when they gathered round him to pick up their things, we saw that it was Saul.

And we were not surprised, for all along he had shown himself the bitter enemy of The Way and had busied himself in trying to block it.

CHAPTER XV

But now a very strange thing happened, and, rightly or wrongly, for after all we were not much more than boys, the recollection of it afterwards always afforded us a certain consolation.

From the top of the Mound a man came running swiftly. He had seen and heard the commotion below, and he wanted to know what it was all about.

He came to the top brink of the hollow as the others gathered round Saul to put on their things, and we saw that it was Jesus-ben-Jesus. He stood looking down. He saw the body under the stones and understood.

And then he saw who it was, and suddenly he became a madman.

With a cry of rage, like the roar of a wounded beast, he leaped down into the hollow. He gathered an armful of stones, and with all the might of the passion that was in him he hurled them into the ring round Saul.

He was obviously possessed, but it did not affect his aim. Every stone told and every one brought down a man.

He gathered more stones — endless stones — and showered them on them before they knew more than that something had struck them.

They were so taken by surprise that retaliation was impossible. They were lying everywhere, bruised and bleeding, with stones and sharp pieces of rock raining down on them without ceasing.

They crawled away as they could, dragging their garments after them, and Saul slunk off limping on one leg, for, as we heard afterwards, a piece of rock had caught him on the knee and shattered it.

Ben-Jesus hurled his rocks without any distinction of person. Fortunately John and I were at the opposite side from Saul and his people, and so we escaped his wild onslaught.

When it began, most of the spectators turned and fled also, for they saw that he was possessed, and when a madman starts killing, no-one is safe.

He hurled a few stones after them and then

went to Stephanos and picked all the pieces of rock off him. He knelt by him and lifted his bruised head.

And when he saw that he was dead he flung his right hand up towards the sky, and cried hoarsely — "Lord God ! — a seven-fold curse on those who did this thing ! . . . May they —— "

And then John stole up to him and put his arm round his neck — at which Ben-Jesus started violently.

"Don't ! — Ben-Jesus — don't !" said John through his sobs. "With his last breath Stephanos begged God to forgive them."

Ben-Jesus drew in several deep laboured breaths which shook his whole body.

"Did he so ?" he groaned. "He was a saint. . . And he is dead . . . murdered by those devils as they murdered The Master. . ."

"He is with The Master now."

"Ay !" — Ben-Jesus breathed a deep agonized sigh which shook him all over again, and he bowed himself over the body of the one he had so greatly loved.

And presently we saw a small company hastening up towards us from the city, and at its

head an elderly man with white hair and beard.

"It is old Gamaliel," whispered John.

And when they drew near we saw that his face was full of anxious grief.

He knelt by the body of Stephanos but saw in a moment that he was dead, and he bowed his head over it.

"Now God forgive us all !" he groaned. "I would to God this had not come to pass ! — God forgive us ! God forgive us !"

And presently he said, "He was surely a man after God's own heart. . . Leave him now to me. I will see to his burial."

There was nothing more we could do, save mourn for our friend, and we went sorrowfully back to the city.

It was getting towards night and we were able to pass through the gate without attracting undue attention. We went straight to Mary's house and found her distraught, her face swollen with weeping.

"They have killed him as they killed The Master," she sobbed.

"Yes, mother," said John. "He has gone to The Master, and all is well with him," and we

told her quietly how Stephanos died, praying God's forgiveness on his murderers, at which she wept afresh.

"After The Master — and Azor at Nazaret — he was the best man I ever knew," she said. "And he is gone ! . . . They will do us all to death before they have finished," and then, turning to Ben-Jesus, she said, "I cannot be sorry you stoned them, Jesus-ben-Jesus, though I fear The Master and Stephanos will not like it. But we are but simple folk and those others deserved what they got. But — if Saul and his people recognized you it will go ill with you. They will never rest till they have sent you after Stephanos and The Master. You had better get away. . . Go up to Nazaret to Azor-ben-Azor. You will be safe there and he will do you good."

"I may be needed here," he said, stoutly yet gloomily. "Since they have done this evil thing they may do more. I shall stop here and help. . . If they kill me — well, you know, I ought to have died at Passover time when they put The Master on the cross instead of me. So here I stay !" And nothing we could say would move him from that.

Mary was somewhat reassured when we told her that in his madness on the Mound he was so transformed that we hardly knew him ourselves, and so it was not likely that any of the rest would have recognized him.

"But," she said gloomily, "if Saul saw him, he would know him and he's not one to forget."

It was not very long before Ben-Jesus's help was needed, and many were the better for his stopping in the city.

The killing of Stephanos, the much-loved administrator, struck fear into the hearts of the followers of the New Way. Most of them, however, remained true to it. They had not lightly renounced the old for the new, and their leaders, in their teaching, had told them they must expect trouble and that it would put their faith and their courage to the proof.

Saul was no sooner about again than he led the persecution against them with a vindictive zeal which spared none. Old and young he laid hands on them, entering their houses by day and by night and hauling them off to prison, from which many went only to their deaths.

And now I was able to repay Mary and John somewhat of all I owed to them.

My father's house was safe from intrusion by Caiaphas, or Saul, or anyone less than Pilate, or other Roman of equal rank.

Varus was willing, even eager, to help, and so Mary and John and Jesus-ben-Jesus came there and stopped with us.

Mary was sure Caiaphas would never let his people disturb her in her own house. But we doubted if Caiaphas could any longer control his own instruments — Saul and the rest — who seemed as possessed of evil as Ben-Jesus had been on the Mound.

Many of the believers got away into the country as quickly as they could — to Samaria, to Galilee, and even further afield — anywhere to escape the deadly clutches of Saul and his myrmidons.

In all the work of getting them away and providing them, as well as might be, with money and directions for their journeyings, Jesus-ben-Jesus worked heroically, carrying his life in his hand, and sparing himself nothing.

Many escaped and carried with them the word of the New Life; and so the persecution, whose

object was its total extinction, had just the opposite effect. It scattered the white seeds broadcast over the whole land, and into other lands, and the harvest may be beyond our imagining.

Peter and John-ben-Zebedæus and most of the other leaders remained in Jerusalem. It was the headquarters of the New Faith and they stuck staunchly to their posts, but some were sent away into the country to spread the teaching there where many were inquiring eagerly about it.

Mary's house was no longer safe for those who stayed behind and they had to find separate lodgings elsewhere. But Caiaphas seemed still to deem it useless to take action against them. He satisfied himself with worrying the sheep, and for the time being left the shepherds alone.

Their followers could no longer gather for the teaching in the Temple cloister. They had to meet in secret in one another's houses, with locked doors and shattered windows, and as best they could confirm one another in courage and endurance, by much prayer and the recalling of the promises to such as should remain faithful to the end.

CHAPTER XVI

And now, while the black clouds were gathering all about us, there came one specially for myself — sent, perhaps, to put my still very young faith to the test, and to try what I was made of.

There arrived one day, about this time, letters from my father in Bithynia — one for me and one for Varus, but both of the same purport. And that was that his name had been suggested for an important post in Gaul. Subject to the Emperor's confirmation, of which he had little reason to doubt, he would become pro-consul of the northern portion of that troublesome land.

His orders to Varus were — to prepare for the move — to make the best arrangements he could for settling up all our affairs in Jerusalem, and to be ready to start at once, when he sent the word, to join him at Tarsus where we would take ship for Rome.

To myself he wrote briefly to the same effect, and added that, until he was fully settled in his

new post, I would live in Rome and continue my studies there. Later on I might possibly join him in Gaul.

This was a terrible blow to us both, though, in the nature of things, it was harder on me than on Varus.

We were both catching glimpses of the new and larger life. We were happy in Jerusalem and the friends we had there, in spite of the troubles that beset the followers of the New Way.

But the head of a household expected his orders to be obeyed without question, by son and freedman alike. His authority over us both was absolute, his word final. When he said "Come !" or "Go !" we came and went as did his legionaries, and until now we had never dreamed of the possibility of doing anything else.

But now I was feeling within me the stirrings of the new spirit which these last few months had brought to life. Doubtfully, and at first I must confess, timidly, and filled with amazement at daring even to think of such a thing, I began to wonder, for the first time in my life, if I ought not to refuse to obey my father — an almost unheard-of thing to contemplate, and certain to be

visited with direst penalties and much personal suffering.

For the first time in my life I was brought roughly up against the rival claims of a divided allegiance.

I had always implicitly obeyed my father's orders, such obedience was the foundation of all family and social life.

Now he bade me follow him — to Rome and all that Rome implied.

And The Master himself had said to me, "Follow thou *me !*"

Which, then ? My father or The Master ? For those two commands had nothing in common. I knew, without a doubt, that they led in ways and towards ends entirely divergent and opposed.

Of Rome, I remembered actually only enough to doubt and dread the thought of living there. It is true I had you there, my Sergius Paulus, and your sister, and your father and mother. (Again, as ever, I pray for you all the blessing of God, the Father of my Master, Jesus, the Christ.) But, for the rest, the millions in Rome, and all their doings, I loathed and dreaded the very

thought of living among them. Doubtless there were many others not sunk in the iniquities I heard tell of. But, for the most part, Rome was to me but another name for ultimate evil.

My mind was sorely exercised over the matter. On the one side were my father, friends, position, fortune — for my father had amassed considerable wealth in his various appointments; on the one side, then, was everything a young man could desire, and on the other side were the New Way, and outcastry and loss. But, standing in that New Way was The Master, calling me quietly with his starry eyes to follow *him* whithersoever he might lead. And, through all the troubled questionings within me, I knew that in the end I must do so.

I look back now with some wonder that I could ever have doubted which road to take. But, you must remember, all this was three years ago and my faith in The Master and his New Way was very young, indeed was as yet hardly fully born.

The hardest question — and the most insidious — was whether I should break away now, or yield for the present in the hope that something might happen to lessen, or even to obviate, the

bitterness of the blow, for it could not fail to be a very sore trouble to my father. My sick mind tried to argue that it could not be right to wound him so sorely — that present yielding might enable me to work in secret for the New Way while still pretending obedience to the Old — and many another specious reason for not doing that which the new spirit within me told me plainly was the only right thing to do.

It was indeed a tremendous issue for so young a believer, and one so inexperienced in the world. And yet perhaps it came at just the right time — the age that craves a hero to worship — the age of enthusiastic readiness to sacrifice everything to an ideal. Jesus had captured my heart and my imagination. Sooner or later, I knew, deep down within me, how the matter must end. But it was that specious sooner or later that set me floundering.

When I had worried myself nearly sick over it, I carried my trouble to Mary and begged her advice.

She understood all I was feeling, and the magnitude of the issue on all my future life. But she hesitated at advising so drastic a step as the

absolute defiance of my father's orders, and what must inevitably follow.

And finally, she said, "The wisest ones I know are Zerah and Azor up there in Nazaret. Go up and lay it all before them, Cornelius. What they say will be right. I know what they will say, and I think you know it too, but they are wiser than either you or I."

"Yes, I know what they will say, but it will help me to hear them say it."

"Take Varus with you, Cornelius. This concerns him as much as it does you."

And so it was decided, and Varus and I set off very early the following morning for Nazaret, and much deep talk we had as we went.

The country-sides were very beautiful, radiant with flowers and the ripening crops. But so occupied were we with our pressing affairs that we did not perhaps knowingly give great heed to these things, and yet I think they silently influenced us. For our doubts and fears grew less as we walked, and we were able to discuss our problems calmly and sensibly and with increasing courage.

We reached Nazaret on the third day, and

Azor and Zerah were greatly surprised at the sight of us.

After we had washed and eaten, we sat in the workshop in the sunset and laid all our matter before them and begged their advice.

When we had ended, Zerah sat looking out over the sun-gold country-side, with that far-away look in her eyes which seemed to search beyond earthly things, and I sat and watched her. At all times she was wonderfully beautiful, but when she sat like that, looking out into another world — truly one could well believe that she belonged more to that world into which she gazed than to this one in which she sat.

Varus sat looking at her with eyes full of wonder and reverence and awe. He sat as one paralysed, and seemed hardly to dare to breathe lest this, to him, vision of another world should vanish.

"What do you advise, Zerah ? . . . Azor ?" I asked at last, when their silence began to irk me.

Then Azor said weightily, "One hesitates to advise a son to disobey his father. Obedience is one of the foundations of the Law. But . . . you have counted the cost, Cornelius ?"

"I have counted the cost. It means giving up everything."

"And you are ready for that ?"

"I think I am, Azor. But what I shall do, or even how live, I do not know. It is all dark before me."

"Nay, Cornelius — all light," said Zerah quickly. "What was it Jesus said to you that morning by the Lake ?" — just as Azor had once asked me.

"He said, 'My son, follow thou me !' "

"And in your heart that day you promised him you would do so."

"Yes, Zerah, I did."

"You cannot fail him now. That would be to wound him sorely. I know all that it must mean to you. . . I know something of what it meant to him to give up everything. . . But your life could never come to the full if you turned from him now, Cornelius. . . I remember his saying once that the man who tries to save his life shall lose it, and the man who loses his life for the Kingdom shall save it. . . And he said, too, that his New Way was bound to divide families, setting son against father, and mother

against daughter. But he said also that if your father casts you out he will take you up and care for you."

"He said that? Then he foresaw ——"

"Yes," she said, with the far look in her eyes again. "He foresaw. . . He was very wonderful."

Then she came back to earth again. "You give up everything that you think makes life good to you, Cornelius. He gave his life as well. If you give up everything, you gain everything. He promises a thousand-fold in this world for all you give up in this world. You may suffer — nay, you will suffer, but it is nothing compared with the new life he will give you. And The Way will *not* be dark before you, it will be all light. There is no darkness where he is. He is Light, and Truth, and Love, and All Delight to all who give themselves to him. You will come, Cornelius?"

"I will come, Zerah."

And there and then I gave myself wholly to The Master for whom she pleaded so earnestly.

"And you, Varus?" she asked, turning upon him those great, confident, expectant eyes of hers.

"I follow my young master and The Great Master," said Varus stoutly.

"In him there are no masters or servants. We are all brothers and sisters. I am richer today by two dear brothers," and she came over to us, and put her hands on our shoulders and kissed us both very lovingly on the cheek.

I was so overcome by that, and by all that had gone before, that I dropped back on to the bench and hid my face in my hands lest the others should see my upsetting. I can still feel that soft sweet kiss, and see her starry eyes looking into me just as The Master's did. And I shall never forget these things.

CHAPTER XVII

When at last I dared to look up, Zerah had gone, but Varus still sat there as I had been, and when at last he looked up his eyes were still very bright, and he was a grown man of thirty.

Azor was sitting there quietly. He gave us a brotherly smile.

"How wonderful she is!" I said, with bated breath.

"Yes, she is very wonderful. But, you see, she knew Jesus better than any, and he loved her very dearly."

Then, in quiet talk with Azor, we settled our next steps, on the lines we had discussed on our way up.

We would return to Jerusalem after one full day's rest at Nazaret, and there would arrange for the disposal of my father's properties. And when his final orders arrived, Varus would send by trusty messenger to Tarsus the moneys and our letters, explaining, as far as letters could ex-

plain, what we had decided to do, and why.

"You would not go up yourself and tell him all about it, Cornelius?" asked Azor thoughtfully. "After all, he is your father, and you may never see him again."

At which Varus and I, knowing my father and what manner of man he was, looked at one another, and I said, "No, Azor, we have decided all that. Do you know what would happen if I went?"

"You would have a stormy time, I suppose."

"No. He would simply deem us both mad, and would have us bound and carried onto the ship, and we should find ourselves in Rome."

"Then of a surety you are well advised not to go."

"Moreover, when he receives our letters, do you know what he will do, Azor? He will send word to the Procurator here to take us and send us to Rome. . . But they say that Pilate has troubles enough of his own since Sejanus fell. So it is possible he will not trouble much about us. We must be prepared for that, however."

So, after one full day's rest we set off again for Jerusalem, and Zerah and Azor came down the

hillside and set us on our way, much cheered by their certainty that we were doing right in this matter, even though my father, and all our friends outside the New Way, would deem us mad.

Things fell out much as we had foreseen. My father's final orders arrived, and Varus settled up all his affairs, and sent our letters and the balance of the moneys up to Tarsus to await him there.

Then followed an ominous silence — not a word of acknowledgment either of our letters or the money. Indeed we did not know if he had received either, till one day one of Claudia Procula's maids came to bid me call on her at once at Herod's palace, which Pilate was using as his official residence.

I liked Claudia Procula. She had always been kind and gracious to me when we met. And she had been a good wife to Pilate. If he had taken her advice at times he would have avoided some of his many mistakes.

I was taken up at once to her private room, and she asked anxiously, "What have you been doing, Cornelius? We have an urgent request — you might almost say an order, but that we take orders from none but Cæsar — to send you at once to

Rome along with Varus, your father's freedman. What have you been doing ?"

Whereupon I laid the whole matter before her. And the first time I mentioned Jesus, she clapped her hand to her heart and broke in:

"The Galilean again ! There is no end to him. I have heard very strange things about him, Cornelius, since — you know ! . . . I had a premonition about him. Something in me — or in him — told me he was a good man. If Pilate would only have hearkened to me, he would never have given him up to those screaming Jews. He ought never to have been killed. . . He will make an end of us yet. I know it."

"If you so will, Lady Claudia, it is not an end he will make of you but a beginning," I said, rather timidly, for it was my first attempt at teaching the New Way, and she was a great lady.

"Tell me all you know of him," she said urgently. And I stood there before her and told her all I knew.

She listened with intense interest, her eyes very wide at times, and at times her brows pinched with perplexity.

With very wide eyes, she asked, with a touch of awe in her voice, "You mean that you really saw him . . . alive, Cornelius . . . after the cross ?"

"I ate with him, Lady Claudia, and he laid his hand on my head and spoke to me and to all the others."

"What did he say ?" she asked, in an eager whisper.

"He said, 'My son, follow thou me !' "

And after a minute she said, "Yes — you could not go to Rome. It is a vile and vicious place, for the most part, and every year it gets worse. . . But this that you tell me is amazing beyond belief, Cornelius. Do you understand it all yourself ?"

"No. It is too wonderful for anyone to understand properly. But Zerah says it is better to believe than to understand. She and Azor lived nearly all their lives with Jesus; and through them, and through what I have seen myself, I believe that he is the son of the One God, and that he wants me, and all of us, to follow his New Way."

She sat looking at me, thinking deeply.

"It is all the very opposite of what we have all been living and thinking," she said at last. "If your Jesus's way prevails it must turn the world upside down. . . As for you, Cornelius, feeling as you do about it all and about him, you could but do as you are doing. But take my advice, for I wish you well. Get away from Jerusalem at once ! Out of Pilate's sight he will not trouble much about you. . . He has more than enough troubles of his own since Sejanus went," she said, with a sigh.

"You have given me much to think about — overmuch, indeed," she said, as I kissed her hand and took my leave of her. "Your New Way is better than ours which is all strife and confusion. May the gods — or your God — keep you !"

CHAPTER XVIII

The enforced seclusion, and the anxiety about her friends, and the lack of her usual activities had begun to tell on Mary's health. She fell into low spirits and periods of brooding, and always the peace and happiness of her little house on the hillside at Nazaret — so very different from the miseries and panics of Jerusalem — called to her. And as John also was very impatient of the restraints of necessity imposed upon him in the city, we decided to make the move there at once.

We did our utmost to persuade Ben-Jesus to accompany us, for his life was undoubtedly in constant peril. But he had found his work and he would not leave it. And I really believe that the daily risks he ran gave to this new life a zest which had been somewhat amissing to him of late. He and danger had been road-mates for so long that even the new life without that spice would still have been life with a lack in it.

Our journey was quiet and prosperous. In

Samaria we came upon Philip carrying on a vigorous campaign, and rejoiced with him at the eagerness of the people to receive the teaching of The Way.

At Nazaret, Azor and Zerah, and Zoë and Miriam and the boys gave us whole-hearted welcome. For they had heard of the persecutions in Jerusalem and had feared greatly for us.

Among these best of friends and devoted followers of The Master, and in the country we and they loved more than any other, the time passed very happily with us. And for myself I can never be grateful enough for all that I gained by my close companionship with those rare souls, Zerah and Azor-ben-Azor — with Zerah especially.

She seemed to me to have in her, and to give out as naturally as she breathed, the very spirit of The Master as I was coming to know him.

She was always doing, and always happy. For, in addition to her household duties, she was the joy and help of all the sick and sorrowful in Nazaret and all that neighbourhood, and the calls upon her were innumerable.

Azor too, though in different ways, was a

tower of strength to all in need, and they were never lacking.

Now, for the first time in my life, I had to think of ways and means of living. Varus, too, having given up his position, was in the same case, though it would naturally be easier for him to find fresh work than for me who had never had to do any.

We could, of course, as followers of the New Way, have claimed to share in the common fund. But there were already very many claimants on it, and after the death of Stephanos it was not as well managed as when he devoted himself entirely to it.

Mary would have had us live on such of her income as she did not give to the fund. But, in the flush of our enthusiasm for the new life, we were set on earning for ourselves sufficient to provide, at all events, for our simple lodging and feeding.

As it happened, Azor's assistant in the workshop — Neri, the lively young son of Jotham the smith — had fallen and broken his leg the very day before we arrived; and with work always coming in, Azor jumped at the offer of our help.

I myself, though eager to be of any service, was not much use except to fetch and carry. Varus, however, could use his hands to good purpose, having been accustomed to work of all kinds before my father gave him his freedom.

So he helped Azor in the rougher parts of his craft and I did what they told me. And young John, not to be left out, helped me. So that Azor laughingly declared that Neri's broken leg was a piece of good fortune — except to Neri, and that he had never had so many helpers before.

We all worked very happily together. Indeed, in that workshop where Jesus had toiled so faithfully, we could not but work well and happily. And often, when their other duties permitted, Zerah and Zoë would come and sit among the sweet-smelling shavings of pine and cedar, and liven us with their presence and their talk.

Of a night I was weary as never in my life before, but the knowledge I gained in those days of the satisfaction of honest labour, and the healthy craving for food and sleep which came of it, were worth much to me.

Now and again, when his work permitted, Azor would take a day off, and he and John and

I would ramble away over the hills to the places where Jesus and he used to go as boys — to the pond in the hollow where they went swimming — to the ridge above the high road along which the caravans passed to and from the sea — to Nain to see Arni.

And as we went, Azor would dig up from his memory stories of his friend Jesus which made him joyously alive in our minds and hearts. But, at times, as he told of these things, the thought of The Master, as I had seen him, bruised and bent beneath his cross as he went to his death, would stab me with the pain of it.

And at such times I had to wrench my mind back to that early morning on the shore of the Lake, when we had met him in the radiance of his victory over death, and he had put his hands on our heads and called us to serve him.

I believed in him as fully as these my friends did, and gave my heart to him and his service with all the enthusiasm of my young manhood, which had found a hero upon whom its highest hopes and outreach could be centred.

Now and again, and always when we went to see Arni and his mother at Nain, Zerah would

go with us, and of such times I have many rare, sweet memories.

I remember well how, as we were returning one afternoon from Nain, we stopped for a rest on the hillside; and Zerah, presently, after looking thoughtfully about her, said suddenly, "Azor — John — do you remember ? This is the very place we sat down to rest that day when Jesus had called Arni back —— "

"Yes," said Azor, "and just up there is the place Jesus and I once met his cousin, John the Baptiser — him that Herod killed in Machærus — a queer wild-looking fellow he was, all tangled hair and skins, and eyes like smouldering fires. . . We had little Tobias with us that time, and Tobias did not like him. Perhaps it was the skins he wore."

"Dear little Tobias ! How Jesus loved him !" said Zerah softly.

"Who was Tobias ?" I asked, for everything concerning The Master interested me intensely, and I had not heard of Tobias.

"Tobias was Jesus's little dog and his very dear little friend," said Zerah.

"His dog ?"

"His very dear little friend; and when he died Jesus missed him sorely and mourned him deeply. . . But," she said, with a happier look on her face, "I am always glad to remember that when Jesus came back to us that evening in the workshop, after they had killed him in Jerusalem, he brought little Tobias with him."

"Brought Tobias with him !" I jerked, in vast amazement.

"Yes," said Azor quietly. "Tobias came too and we all rejoiced to see him again with his master."

John had been groping backwards in his thoughts also, and now he burst out, "Wasn't it here, and that day, that Jesus told us about himself — that he was the promised Deliverer and the son of the Most High ?"

"Yes, it was here, the day he called back Arni," said Azor. "But it was too great a thing for us to understand . . . except perhaps Zerah."

"It was beyond anyone's understanding — in full, and always will be. How should our little minds comprehend the deep ways of God ? . . . Not very much more," she said musingly, "than little Tobias comprehended his master. . . I

think sometimes that if we could all love God, as Jesus told us about Him, as little Tobias loved Jesus — with every little bit of our hearts — it would be very well with us. He will not ask much more than that of us, I think. For love like that would give everything . . . everything . . . " and her large dark eyes were swimming as she looked away out, beyond, I was sure, anything that human eyes could see.

CHAPTER XIX

One very strange thing happened to us, the full bearing of which we cannot yet apprehend. It may mean things beyond our understanding for The Master's cause. But, whatever it means in the days to come, it was to some of us then a matter of vast amazement, and to some of us a cause for very great hope.

John and I were sitting among the shavings in a corner of Azor's workshop one evening, chatting with him as he went on with his work.

It was the time when the neighbours from the village below usually came up to consult him about their tangled affairs.

And presently we saw a man coming slowly up the hill-path. He seemed weary and he limped somewhat with one leg.

"Who's this ?" said John.

And Azor, looking out at the man, shook his head and said, "I don't know him."

The stranger came straight along to the house.

And suddenly John's hand gripped my arm till it seemed as if his nails had cut into it, and I felt him holding in his breath in great excitement. And then, as the man came closer and stood there in the glow of the sunset, I understood.

"I seek one — Azor-ben-Azor," he said.

"I am Azor-ben-Azor."

"I am Saul" — and then he caught sight of us sitting in the corner — "Why — Cornelius Flaccus ! — And John Marcus ! — you know me."

"Yes, Saul, we know you," I said, in, I doubt not, no very welcoming voice. For in both our hearts, as John confessed to me afterwards, was the fear that he had learned we were here and had followed us to make an end of us all.

What other thought could we possibly have of him ? We had left him in Jerusalem harrying the converts to the New Way with a ruthlessness that knew no bounds. We had come to Nazaret to escape him. And here he was !

"Nay then," he said quietly, "I am not the Saul you knew. . . I am a new man. I have received a commission — a commission direct from The Master — to preach where I persecuted — to build where I destroyed. It is a strange story. . ."

We sat gazing at him in doubt and great astonishment. If our mouths were not agape our minds most certainly were.

Azor stepped into the house and came back in a moment with Zerah.

"You must be Zerah, the daughter of Matthat-ben-Nathan," said Saul. "I wanted to see The Master's home . . . John, it was your uncle Barnabas set me on the road and bade me ask for Azor-ben-Azor and Zerah, the daughter of Matthat."

"Uncle Barnabas ?" gasped John.

"I met him in Damascus, and he was good to me when I sorely needed help. He is a good man, with a heart as big as his body and a very open mind. He found me broken and helped to heal me."

Zerah and Azor waited quietly for what he was evidently anxious to tell us.

As for John and myself, with the memory of the murder of Stephanos, and all his other evil doings, still sore in our hearts and minds, we could not hide the doubt and repulsion that were in us, and I do not know that we tried to do so.

We had heard many stories of Saul's wily methods of trapping people in their talk — with smooth words and innocent questions leading them on till he had got what he wanted, and then suddenly turning on them with the ferocity of a wild beast.

But, armoured against him as we were, and determined not to be tricked, we could not but notice a great change in the man.

There was none of the old avid bitterness in his face. His voice was softened. There was in his eyes something of that light which I had come to recognize in the followers of The Master. His whole manner was changed. It no longer suggested a wolf hunting sheep, but rather the shepherd anxious for his flock.

But it was that in his eyes which inclined me to a glimmer of belief in his possibly meaning no ill to us.

"You must try to believe what I am going to tell you," he said, but he spoke more directly to Zerah and Azor than to us, which was natural, since it was they whom he had come to see.

Zerah's clear perception saw deeper than we

did. She said gently, "We will believe you, Brother Saul. Here, in the house where Jesus lived, you could not lie to us."

He bowed his head and said earnestly:

"Henceforth I lie to no man. But" — looking straight into her radiant eyes, with a responsive kindling in his own — "it would be a lost soul indeed that could lie to you, Zerah. . . Listen !

"In Jerusalem, as you know — to my eternal shame and sorrow now — I wrought much evil to the followers of the New Way. . . I believed then that I was in the right. The teaching of Jesus was opposed to everything I had been taught. I felt it my duty to put a stop to it, and I did my uttermost. Now, the evil that I did there — the many good souls I sent to prison and to death. . . God forgive me ! They lie heavy on my soul and will do till I die.

"Word came to me of the many converts in Damascus. I would root it out there also. I got authority from Caiaphas. I had letters to Aretas, the King. I started with men enough to carry out my will. . .

"And when, after many days, we were nigh Damascus — there, at mid-day, on the high road,

without warning, there came a blinding light which struck me from my horse. . . And in that blinding flash I saw but one thing . . . but one thing, but it blotted out everything else in the world. . . For one instant, I saw the face of him whom I last saw upon the cross outside Jerusalem . . . the face of Jesus . . . and in that instant I knew that he was The Christ — the Son of God. . .

"And he said to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me ?'

"And I asked him, 'Who are you ?'

"And he said 'I am Jesus, and you persecute me. Get up and go into the city. There you will be told what I would have you do.'

"But when I rose from the ground I was blinded. I could see nothing — nothing save the face of him I had seen in the flash. And that never left me — nor ever will. Nor would I that it should.

"Those who were with me had seen that blinding light — but not what was in it. They heard the sound of the voice — but not what it said to me.

"They led me into the city and there for three

days I lay, blinded and helpless, and neither ate nor drank — but not in the dark, for his face was ever with me, burning out the darkness of my soul.

"Then, after three days, there came to me a saintly man — one Ananias. He told me he had been sent by Jesus to give me back my sight and to fill me with his Mind and Spirit. And as he spoke, my eyes were opened, and I praised God. And when they had given me food I was strong again.

"I had much talk with Ananias, and he told me all The Master's will for me.

"He has chosen me — the persecutor — to carry his word to the Gentiles. For his hope and his promise are not for us Jews only but for all men everywhere.

"When my sight was restored to me, and Ananias had laid his hands upon me, and I felt in me that wonderful new power of the Spirit, I went into the synagogues and proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. And the authorities, who would have welcomed me as persecutor, were amazed at me as the preacher of Christ and rose against me and would have had my life.

"But Ananias bade me leave the city and go into solitude — as he says The Master loved to do — and there find myself more fully and learn all God's will for me.

"I am on my way there now. But I desired much to see first for myself the place where my Lord lived and those whom he had loved. And so, by the advice of Barnabas, I have come to you."

"Brother Saul," Zerah said, in that full soft voice of hers which was like sweet music, "we welcome you in the name of him who was so dear to us — as he has already welcomed you."

And Azor added, "Rest with us for a day or two, Brother Saul, and then go on your journey. We can tell you much about him."

"I am grateful," said Saul. "I will gladly rest with you for a day or two, and you will tell me all you can."

"The whole of our lives would not suffice for that," said Azor. "But we can tell you much."

Then, in a tone and with a gentleness of manner that should have told us, more than many words, of the greatness and reality of the change

that had been wrought in him, Saul turned to John and me:

"And you? Will you not receive me also?"

Now we had seen more of the evil side of him than had Zerah and Azor. The death of our dear friend Stephanos was still red and raw in our memories. And we had neither the experience nor the largeness of soul which enabled them to apprehend the greatness of the change that had taken place in him.

I stammered, "Since Zerah and Azor welcome you, Saul, I do so also," and felt myself unusually valiant and virtuous in granting so much.

And John, who had not yet had time to get over his dread and dislike of the man whom he had known only as a ruthless persecutor, said briefly:

"I will try, Saul."

"Jesus did not *try* to forgive or to welcome," said Zerah softly. "He did it always fully and at once."

And we felt small before them.

When we presently went up to our own house, and broke the news to Mary, she was greatly upset, though we did it as gently as possible.

We told her one had arrived who had been bitter against the followers of the New Way but was now changed and had become a follower himself.

She eyed us questioningly and asked anxiously, "Who is it, John ?"

"Saul."

"John !" she gasped, and her face went grey with apprehension. *"Saul ?* . . . It is not possible ! . . . *Saul !"*

Between us we told her briefly what he had told us down below there. But she was still very doubtful, and more inclined to think that he was tricking us than that he could possibly have become a follower of The Master.

"But what brought him here ?" she asked suspiciously.

"Uncle Barnabas told him to come."

Uncle Barnabas ! Did he say Uncle Barnabas sent him ? . . . But that may only be another of his lies."

"Zerah and Azor have welcomed him, and have asked him to stop for a day or two before he goes on his way into the desert."

"They don't know him as we do. . . *Saul* —

a follower of The Master!" — and she found herself utterly unable to credit it.

She could not bring herself to go down to the other house; and when, as the time passed, Zerah noticed this, I think she understood. For she came up and talked long with Mary and then went disappointedly back. And Azor told us afterwards that Saul said, "This is what I must expect. It will take long to wipe out the reproach of the past. And I am justly punished. I will go up and see Mary myself."

And he went. Mary never told us all that passed or how he convinced her. But after a long time they came down together, and Mary's eyes were very red, and Saul's face was soberly glad. He had won one of the many conflicts that awaited him.

Miriam and Zoë accepted him as they would have accepted anyone whom Zerah and Azor welcomed. But the boys were quieter than usual, for Saul had not the attractive presence nor the winning ways of their friend Jesus, which drew them to him and made them want to climb up on to his knees and put their arms round his neck and ask for stories.

CHAPTER XX

SAUL stayed three days with Zerah and Azor, and they showed him all the places most closely associated in their hearts with The Master.

Zerah gave him her own room to sleep in, and when he learned that it was the one Jesus himself had always used, he understood, and was very grateful.

She told us afterwards that as soon as she saw him the next morning she knew at once that the influence of the room had had the effect on him which she had hoped. For his face was calm, the pinched and puckered lines smoothed out; almost, she said, he looked happy, and in his eyes there was a glow and a hope.

And as they walked, he told her that he had never slept so well since he was a boy. "For," he said soberly, "my nights, these later times, were sorely troubled with the things I had done and the things I planned to do, and often I slept but little. And, when I did sleep, the dreams I

dreamed were often so terrible that I woke in a sweat of horror . . . the faces of those I had sent to their deaths . . . the homes I had broken . . . the anguish I had caused. For, Zerah," he said, "I can tell you, though I have never told it to any other — in it all I had begun to have my doubts, and, to stifle them, I thrust harder and harder. My dear old master, Gamaliel-ha-Zaken, warned me, not once but many times, that I might find myself fighting against God. . . And it was so. But I would not be warned. But I slept last night like a child," and he added eagerly — "but I dreamed like a man. For it seemed to me that I was carried by the Spirit here and there over the whole world. And everywhere power was given to me to preach Christ — Christ crucified and risen from the dead. And everywhere the people heard me gladly and gave up their evil and turned to him. . . Ay !" he said, with a far look in his eyes, "a wonderful dream !" — and stretching his arms out and up — "I would to God it might be realized in me ! . . . But that is too much to hope for. . . And yet" — and Zerah said his eyes blazed upon her — "who knows ? Since he could save Saul, who is there that he cannot save ? — and why not

by the life of Saul ? — and, if needs be, by his death." And, in the fervour of that great hope, he walked, she said, for a long time in silence.

On the last day of his stay they took him over the hills to Nain to see Arni, who always rejoiced at their coming.

And Saul talked much with him about his beloved friend, Jesus, and of their days among the hills, and their games, and of all that had made Jesus the hero of his boyhood. But he asked him no questions about that most amazing experience of his dying and being called back to life by a word from his old schoolfellow. For Azor had forewarned Saul that Arni could tell him nothing about that.

And, as they talked, Azor told him of Jesus's love for all the little things, the birds and the beasts, and especially of little Tobias, which exercised Saul greatly.

"A dog ?" he said, in shocked surprise. "Could he waste his love on a dog ?"

"He never wasted anything," Zerah told him. "But he loved Tobias and Tobias loved him. I shall never forget his grief when the little one died. . . But Tobias came back with him . . .

afterwards. . ." And they told him of that wonderful visit when The Master came to them as they sat in the workshop, and spoke and ate with them, and little Tobias with him. After which, she said, Saul stalked along as though that was almost too much for him.

From what Zerah told us, I am sure he carried with him into the desert many new, and to him very amazing, ideas about The Master to whose service his life was to be given.

He had seen him from the outside, and had opposed him with all the vigour and rancour of his mistaken idea of him.

He had had a spiritual revelation of him which, in a flash, had turned his life upside down and inside out.

Now, from Zerah and Azor, he was learning of the grace and beauty of the homely life he had lived among his fellows. And that surely completed his ideal of the One he had been chosen to serve, as nothing else could have done.

All that these two told him he accepted implicitly, no matter how amazing it was to him. For they told only of the things they had themselves seen and knew. And it would have been

a strange gnarled soul indeed that would question or doubt anything that Zerah and Azor told about their friend Jesus.

Zerah said that Saul did not speak much on these long walks, beyond asking questions. They delighted to tell him all they knew, and he was satisfied to listen to it all, and no doubt stored it all in his mind to ponder over in his solitude.

John and I did not accompany them on their rambles. For, in spite of our acceptance of this new and surprising Saul, there were between him and us such terrible memories that we could not bring ourselves to feel entirely at ease with him no matter how we tried. And the more we tried the less at ease we were.

We were indeed relieved when he bade us farewell, and Zerah and Azor went off down the hill with him to set him on his way. For his past was too close to us, and his future was hidden from us, as it was from himself.

But Zerah and Azor both spoke hopefully of him.

"If he keeps in his present mind," said Azor — and Zerah interjected an assured, "He will."— "Then I think he may do great things for The

Kingdom. He has a wonderfully acute mind, and now that his heart is set right he should go far."

"Yes, he will go far," said Zerah thoughtfully. "Jesus has taken hold of him, soul and mind and body, and he will never let him go. . . It is just like him . . . his bitterest enemy . . . his greatest follower. . . He is very wonderful."

But as for John and me, we were too small-minded to feel quite sure about him or to perceive his greatness. And so it was with a feeling of relief that we saw him go limping down the hill between Zerah and Azor.

EPILOGUE

Saul — become Paul, the great apostle to the outer world, the most valiant of all the servants of Jesus Christ — died by the executioner's axe in Rome, thirty-one years later, in the tenth year of the Emperor Nero, of infamous memory.

John Marcus and his uncle Barnabas were associated at times with Paul in his mighty labours. It is possible, from some incidents which occurred, that John, greatly as he came to esteem Paul, could never, in the background of his mind, entirely dissociate him from the Saul of his youth — the ruthless persecutor, the condoner, if not the instigator, of the death of their beloved Stephanos. He could forgive, but possibly he could not entirely forget.

Cornelius Pudens Flaccus, the compiler of this brief record for the benefit of his friend Sergius Paulus Græcinus, was one of the first Romans to declare himself a follower of Jesus Christ, whereby

he risked much. In those early days, The Great Adventure of the New Way was beset with many perils. But all that he had, with his own eyes and ears, seen and heard, and through his own personal experiences had probed and tested, had rooted within him a hope and a belief which nothing could destroy.

The ship in which his father sailed for Rome was never heard of after it left Tarsus.

His will was in the hands of his friend Sextus Martius in Rome, who was to act as trustee in the matter. If, as was almost certain, Flaccus senior had, in his anger at Cornelius's defection, executed a codicillum depriving him of any share in his estate, it went down with him.

Sextus Martius proved himself an honest man, and when at last Flaccus senior was given up as dead, his faithful trustee got into touch with Cornelius, through his friend Sergius Græcinus, and he came into his inheritance. He used it wisely and generously in The Master's service, returned eventually to Rome, married in due course Pomponia, and both she and her brother became staunch adherents of the New Way.

During the persecutions in the time of Nero

they all three suffered long imprisonment, expecting death daily. Sergius Paulus died in prison. Ultimately, through the unceasing efforts of Pomponia's father, Salvius Græcinus, senator, and a man of great influence, who loved and respected them though he did not share their beliefs, their lives were spared, on condition that they betook themselves with their noxious ideas to the outermost fringe of the Empire and never return to Rome.

In the year 64, with their four children, they arrived in Britain, just beginning to settle down under Suetonius Paulinus after the terrible Boadicean massacres and counter-massacres.

Flaccus, wise and beneficent as became a follower of Christ, proved himself a mighty influence for good in reconciling the sturdy islanders to the rule of Rome.

When Vespasian became Emperor, in 69, Pomponia's father again exerted his influence on their behalf.

Cornelius Flaccus was appointed Legate for the unruly province of Flavia Cæsariensis, extending from the Humber to the Thames, and from Wales to the North Sea.

He removed from Londinium to Camalodunum, which he helped to build, and spent the remainder of his life there, honoured, and even liked by the wild and obstinate ones among whom his lot was cast.

For in all his life and in all his dealings with them, he strove with all that was in him to do by them as he believed his Master, Jesus Christ, would have done. And no nobler rule of life than that is possible to any man.

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